EXPLORING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL MALES AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

Patrick D. Pauken, Advisor

While mentoring has been promoted as the effective way to improve outcomes among at-risk students, there remain a number of problems for the mentoring of African American students. There has been a growing concern that too many African American students continue to underperform in high school. This has greatly jeopardized their chances of attending college. The primary problem is that studies indicate that African American at-risk students are best mentored by African American staff persons, especially African American principals, but there is a dearth of research on the subject. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the influence of African American male high school principal mentors on the behavior and self-esteem of African American male at-risk high school students. The study examined the perceptions and opinions of six subjects in a high school mentoring program in Detroit, Michigan using a portraiture research design. The six subjects included two African American male high school principals, two African American male at-risk high school students, and two African American male high school students who were not at-risk. The intent of the proposed study was to interview the subjects about their experience in the Mentoring Brother 2 Brother (MB2B) program to explore how relationships between African American high school principals and African American high school male students develop, as well as how principals influence the social behavior and self-esteem of the mentees. Overall, the findings of the study suggest that the mentoring relationships positively impacted the students. However, the findings of the study did not suggest that race was an overt component of the mentoring relationship, as none of the participants focused on the topic of race in the interviews.
I dedicate this project to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path. His mercy and grace have shown me that through him all things are possible.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The job description of the high school principal has changed considerably in recent years, resulting in higher rates of attrition from the position and a growing shortage of candidates (Scott, 2005). In addition, leadership studies have influenced perceptions of the nature of the job of the principal, with most principals now becoming involved in instructional leadership, as they are increasingly being held responsible for the academic and overall well being of the students under their supervision (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, L. & Larose, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, & Muth, 2006). According to Scott (2005), a principal serves as an educational leader when he or she, “understands the needs of the school and is actively involved in the school’s work” (p. 5). This means that all principals must be directly concerned not only with the achievement levels of White middle-class students, but also the persistent problem of an achievement gap with African American students (Rubin, 2001). Studies indicate that too many African American students continue to underperform at the high school level, greatly jeopardizing their chances of attending college (Crutcher, 2007, Neely, 2003).

Many reasons are given to account for the persistent underachievement of African American students, ranging from societal issues to the assertion that mainstream schools are inherently racist (Jones, 2002). Some believe that schools do not take into account background or cultural issues that may contribute to difficulties among African American students, but instead view these students with a negativity that is then internalized and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as students divorce themselves from school goals and even drop out (Neely, 2003). According to a number of studies, African American students report tacit discrimination on a daily basis in school, and, as a result, stay away from situations, which may cause prejudiced attitudes to emerge (Crutcher, 2007; Dunbar, & Villarruel, 2002). Once African American
students are moved away from the normal goals of achievement in school, they are then tracked into less challenging classes, which redirects them down educational dead-ends, and prevents them from moving on to college (Neely, 2003). This is how at-risk students are produced. The at-risk student is defined due to their potential of not graduating from high school. Factors that may contribute to their at-risk status are conflicting family values, dysfunctional familial challenges and misguided social decisions. Ultimately, the same students many times possess phenomenal potential to graduate but because of their misconduct, they are denied the opportunity to receive a high school diploma.

Studies have shown, however, that if a student knows at least one adult at school, that relationship alone can help him or her improve his or her standing in school (Tillman 2003, Ullmann, 2006; Wimberley, 2002;). Having an advocate on staff can greatly enhance the possibility of an African American student graduating from high school (Wimberley, 2002). As a result of these findings, mentors have been introduced to African American student populations in order to ensure that these students have someone to talk to, and someone championing their cause (Wimberley, 2002). A mentor is “a person who nurtures, supports and cares for individuals” in school, and guides students through the requirements and goals of the system, leading them to success (Williams & Matthews, et al., 2004). Mentors for African American students have increasingly come to be seen as essential aids in helping them graduate. However, the literature on mentoring also indicates that finding the right mentor for a particular mentee remains a difficult challenge (Avalon, 2007), and that for African American students, this problem is even more difficult because studies indicate that African American mentees respond well only to African American mentors (e.g., Dawes & Dawes, 2005; Wimberley, 2002). Not only is it difficult for an individual to become a successful mentor, even with training, but
finding African American staff members to be mentors is a problem of supply and demand—there are not enough African American staff members to look after African American students. For this reason, mentoring studies have looked to African American principals as candidates for mentoring of African American students (Hall, 2008).

Mentoring is based on social learning theory, which posits that “personality is learned” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, 2001, p. 4) and that imitation of role models is the best way to learn how to behave in certain situations. A mentor not only models mentee behavior, but he or she can tell stories about examples of best practice or other admirable role models, in order to help the mentee learn to “diagnose problems, reinterpret experiences and perceptions…and learn to talk like a full practitioner” (Williams & Matthews, et al., 2004, p. 61). The mentor can assist the mentee in doing increasingly more difficult professional tasks, thus helping the mentor develop as a professional. Additionally, mentoring has been found to compensate for any attachment issues that a mentee has developed, in terms of trusting authority or not, and improve a mentee’s social skills in adult life (Britner & Balcazar, et al., 2006, p. 750). According to the literature, there are a number of different kinds of mentoring, including direct or indirect mentoring (Morse, 2006), formal and informal mentoring (Shea, 2002), and natural mentoring (Smith, 2006). This study will examine formal mentoring as practiced by African-American principals for African American students.

Statement of the Problem

While mentoring has been promoted by government, school, and community initiatives as the effective way to improve outcomes among at-risk students (Lim, 2003; Moses, 2006), there remain a number of problems for the mentoring of African American students. The primary problem is that studies indicate that African American at-risk students are best mentored by
African American staff persons, especially African American principals (Harris, Ballenger & Leonard, 2004). At present, however, there are not enough African American principals, and they also need mentoring to perform well on the job, and to realize their responsibility of championing the cause of at-risk African American students (Wallace Foundation, 2007). In exploring the areas where there may be parallels between the experiences of African American principals and African American male students, these parallels presumably forming the basis, according to social learning theory, of the effective imitation of modeling that would make this kind of mentoring valuable, the literature has found that African American principals and students have experienced similar problems in achieving success in mainstream U.S. schools (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). At the same time, the literature has examined the success of African American principals and found that, in most cases, African American principals had to engage in additional activities or perform added duties in order to achieve their success (Glomb, Buckley, Minskoff, & Rogers, 2006).

For example, studies have found that African American principals have been successful in schools only if they assume additional societal roles for all students, but African American students and community members in particular, become deeply involved in community affairs, at times becoming a “conduit through which…concerns could be channeled to the black community” (Walker, 2003, p. 70; see also Eanes & Mansaray, 2007). It is particularly true in smaller cities in the southern U.S. that African American school principals have become community leaders in this fashion, a situation that offers new opportunities for creativity for the principal trying to receive support and funding from the community and state (Walker, 2003). This finding reinforces the idea that when an African American male rises to the principalship, he takes on a number of additional roles in the community. In general, however, it remains that
the job description of the African American principal is shaped by the fact that there are very few African American principals in U.S. schools today. When or if an African American is appointed to a principalship, it is often to a failing, segregated, primarily African American urban school, where the scarcity of resources and the poor quality of teachers almost guarantee failure from the start (McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2006). According to critical race theory, the systemic mechanisms by which African American principals are set up to fail in schools is part of a system-wide persistence of tacit racism in U.S. education (McCray, et al., 2006). Systemic bias against people of color carries over into the principalship as well, as most African American principals report feeling less accepted than comparable white professionals (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002).

African American principals also often have problems when they decide that they need to act on behalf of African American students. As most white teachers accept that a “color blind” way of dealing with issues of culture is optimal, an African American leader’s “color conscious” way of dealing with issues of race is often called inequitable and is open to criticism (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 49). The tensions created by the different ways in which African Americans and whites deal with these issues also means that African American principals may have to spend much more of their time on image management, and “having to socially construct their roles to focus on one-on-one leader-member relationships” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 49). In this way, the efforts of African American principals to address the particular problems of African American students may become bogged down in resistance.

Adding to the problems of African American principals helping African American students is that some African American principals are ambivalent about their responsibility vis-à-vis these students. Most believe that, as principal, it is their duty to champion all students,
regardless of race. A generational rift has also opened up in the African American educational community itself, as Baby Boomer-aged leaders continue to believe that it is their responsibility to “uplift the race” (Loder, 2005, p. 247), while younger African American principals, having rarely experienced instances of overt racism, express their “generational privilege” by not focusing directly on the problems of African American students (Loder, p. 253). These principals may not have the same uplifting goals for the job, and may not think it appropriate to engage in special-case or targeted advocacy on behalf of one group of students.

By contrast, studies have shown that African American students respond well to a color-conscious leadership style by an African American principal (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Color consciousness by the principal means that he or she acknowledges that they must play different roles for African American students, being everything from surrogate parent, to advocate, to mentor, to friend (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). Principals who made extra efforts to improve the situation of African American students also developed stronger relationships with these students, even though the principals were occasionally conflicted by this advocacy (Jones, 2002). Indeed, it is on the basis of reports of student preferences for same-race teachers that the idea of African American principals mentoring African American students emerged (Eanes & Mansarray, 2007). While the empirical literature on the added value of having African American principals mentor African American students remains mixed, with some studies finding a positive relationship (Wimberley, 2002). Other studies not being so sure (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006), the level of commitment to African American students reported by most students is believed to provide a strong basis for supporting this arrangement (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, Jones, 2002; & Larose, 2006). Studies have shown that African American principals are much more conscious of being role models to African American students, almost
instinctively develop strong relationships with African American students, and, because they may prefer collaborative styles of leadership, are much more social and attuned culturally to the needs of African American students (Jones, 2002; Ullmann; 2006Wallace Foundation, 2007). One theory to explain why African American principals almost automatically become role models to African American students is that they share an “ethnic kinship” and, in this context, immediately take on the role of a mother or father figure (Jones, 2002).

The same type of relationship is also forged between African American principals and African American teachers, the latter of whom report instances of being protected by the same-race principal almost in the manner of a parent. As a result of studies of this phenomenon, researchers argue that this “strong racial affiliation” must be exploited in order to help African American students do better in U.S. schools. At the same time, the socialized beliefs of African American principals with regard to their affinity with African American students is often complained about by white or other teachers and students, who feel like they are being slighted, and that the principal is practicing favoritism (Jones, 2002; Hall, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2007). On the basis of these studies, then, a number mentoring styles for African American principals and African American students have emerged. Evolving out of models for teacher mentoring which served to lower the teacher attrition rate in schools where they were introduced, these mentoring models emphasize the role of the principal as father figure, role model, confidante, friend and significant adult figure the student can trust (Morse, 2006). Both direct and indirect mentoring models have been introduced, to exploit the apparently inherent advantages of same-race mentoring relationships. The institution of this form of mentoring is reinforced by findings in the literature, which indicate that mismatching mentor and mentee is one of the major reasons for the failure of mentoring (Hall, 2008).
One of the most significant kinds of mismatching occurs when the mentor and mentee cannot communicate across a cultural divide. For that reason, Hobson and Sharp (2005) proposed same-race mentoring as a solution to the mismatching problem, and some studies have found that in such relationships more trust and honesty does develop (Zalaquett, Lopez, 2006; Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006). The fact that same-race mentoring also often establishes relationships on an emotional level, involving a more friendly, reassuring connection, is also supported by the mentoring literature (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). While some studies have found that the ethnicity of mentor or mentee has no bearing on the quality of the relationship established between the two (e.g., Townsell & Kritsonis, 2006), it nonetheless appears that same-race mentors find a way to work around some of the factors, such as lack of time, that plague formal mentoring programs (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). The literature finds that mentoring leads to improved student outcomes, and that the most successful mentoring occurred when a strong relationship develops between mentor and mentee (Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004). Insofar as mentoring between an African American principal and African American student is more likely to forge a relationship on the common ground of racial/cultural experience, and therefore be more emotional in content, this mentor-mentee dyad is consistent with the literature on mentoring best practice. Finally, it is also true that African American principals experienced difficulties in receiving adequate mentoring in their own professional development and as a result may be more sensitive to the ways in which mentoring can fail (Avalon, 2007; Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006).

This by itself may motivate African American mentor principals to work harder on the relationships under their care (Mullen, 2006). The fact that principals are often mentored with leadership in mind also suggests that principals, as mentors, will take a leadership position in the
mentoring dyad (Mullen, 2006). In sum, then, the major problem addressed in the present study is the fact that African American principals continue to have difficulty establishing mentoring relationships with African American students, even when the mentoring literature finds that this relationship dyad is more likely to be characterized by a strong emotional component. This study then addresses the perceptions of African American male principals and African American male at-risk students as to how to create better mentoring relationships between these two groups.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the influence of African American male high school principal mentors on the behavior and self-esteem of African American male at-risk high school students. To achieve this, the study will foster mentoring between African American high school principals and African American high school students. This study will explore formal mentoring, also the study will utilize a type of interviewing termed portraiture, a research design developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), and built on the “explicit recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspective and experiences of people and cultures being studied” (McClellan, 2006, p. 54). The study also seeks to better understand how portraiture can be used to monitor student progress through his life experience. Portraiture addresses a specific element of educational procedure, in this case the context provided by mentoring, and studies how mentoring itself has a direct impact on how the African American child performs in the academic environment.

Portraiture is used as a means to give voice to the interviewee. It is hoped that the results of this approach will encourage mentors to serve as positive role models for African American male students in a manner that helps them build self-esteem. I interviewed six African American
males in a high school community, two African American male students who are deemed to be not at risk, along with two students that are deemed at-risk, along with two African American male principals, in order to identify evidence of the relationship that has been established between them over the course of this study. The portraits were developed from each of the four individuals as they told their story. Portraiture also represents the various ways in which the research negotiates voice, which is a focal point of this study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Voice refers to the individual’s verbal expression of his experience, which is vitally important to this research because the results are based in the experience of the individual. The five aspects of “voice,” as defined in the literature on portraiture, are manifested in the study through the researcher’s choice of methodology, research tools, observation, and interview sites and data analysis techniques. The choice made to utilize portraiture as the method for a qualitative research is supported by the literature on critical race theory (McCray & Wright, et al., 2006).

The study was conducted in Detroit schools. These subjects were interviewed individually. Voice was further explored by discussing with the participants the issue of how their individual voices are situated in the context of personal and professional relationships. I examined whether or not they believe the mentoring has been effective, and if the principals in particular have lived up to their responsibility to aid African American at-risk students. While a number of studies have called for more direct involvement of African American principals in mentoring at-risk African American students (Holloway, 2004). A few studies have provided direct evidence as to the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee in this setting (Mullen, 2006). The fact that little is known about the actual relationship forged between African American principals and African American at-risk male students represents a serious gap in the
literature, and a problem which must be resolved. As a result, this study extends the existing research on the role of African American principals as mentors to African American at-risk male students by examining the relationship between them.

In order to address this problem, this study reviewed the nature of the relationship between principals and students, how principals have implemented mentoring policy with regard to these students, how African American principals cope with the bureaucracy of education, how or if African American principals have become leaders, and whether or not they consider as part of their job description the promotion of the success of African American students. Mentoring is needed for both African American principals and African American at-risk students, and that mentoring between these groups may be the key to improving African-American at-risk student outcomes (Avalon, 2007). How this is best done is another issue addressed by this study, focusing on whether or not African American male principals feel a special responsibility to support the success of African-American male at-risk students, and if they mentor these students differently than they mentor other students, due to background, cultural, racial and other issues. Data derived from interviews with the principals and students also revealed whether or not African American principals are performing adequately in their mentoring role, if their practice is in need of improvement and if mentoring between African American principals and African American students improves student outcomes.

Research Questions

In this qualitative study I interviewed two male African American high school principal mentors and four male African American student mentees in order to derive answers to the following research questions:
1. How do the relationships between African American high school principals and African American high school male students develop?

2. In what ways does mentoring by a male African American high school principal influence the social behavior of a male African American at-risk high school student?

3. In what ways does mentoring by a male African American high school principal influence the self-esteem of a male African American at-risk high school student?

4. What is the impact of mentoring on the principal/mentor?

Significance of the Study

I researched whether African American males mentored by African American male Principals changed in a positive way, and have a higher sense of self esteem and better behavior. Mentoring programs for African American males can provide students with emotional support, encourage them to be more involved in schooling, and help as they transition from school to work or college. The impact of same-race mentoring programs is designed to encourage high-school students to complete high school and become well-rounded individuals. Same-race mentors offer friendship, guidance and positive role models while instilling the social skills needed in the workplace (Jekielek, 2002). Although there is increasing recognition of the benefits of same-race mentoring for African American high school males, there is a need for further research on the influence of mentoring on the behavior and self-esteem of African American high school male students mentored by African American males.

Definitions of Terms

**At-Risk:** A student whose dysfunctional family and social life have impacted his academic performance so seriously that his commitment to continuing education is in jeopardy.
**Color conscious leadership:** A leadership style, as opposed to “color blind” leadership, adopted by African American principals by which they serve as advocates and champions, based on their understanding of the ways in which they are tracked into failure, of African American students (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002).

**Direct mentoring:** Mentoring is biased in your favor. Mentor is impartial, focused on improvement in behavior (Morse, 2006).

**Ethnic kinship:** A theory, which argues that same-race mentoring is most efficacious between principal and student because they share an African American kinship, according to which the principal serves in the role of a father figure for the student (Jones, 2002).

**Formal mentoring:** The relationship is formally established for an introductory or short period, often to meet specific organizational objectives (Shea, 2002).

**Indirect mentoring:** Mentoring is a power free, two-way mutually beneficial relationship. Mentors are facilitators and teachers allowing the protégé to discover their own direction (Morse, 2006).

**Informal mentoring:** This type of off-the-cuff mentoring ranges from one-shot or spontaneous help to occasional or as-needed counseling. There may be no ongoing relationship. This type of intervention is often thought through and heavily change-oriented (Shea, 2002).

**Life history:** A life history approach enables a researcher to better understand how the interviewee’s life and work influence their views. It was deemed, in this approach, however, that such a “complete picture” of the background of the interviewee’s views was not desired, in favor of a slice of life portraiture approach focused on the interviewee’s involvement in the mentoring experience (Knowles, 1992).

**Mentoring:** The creation of an advisory/working relationship between an experienced
Mentoring: Mentoring is help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking’ (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995, p13).

A mentor is defined as “a person who nurtures, supports and cares for individuals or a small group of students” (Avalon, 2007, p. 6). A mentor is, therefore, someone who helps another person through an important transition such as coping with a new situation like a major change in personal circumstances or in career development or personal growth (Avalon, 2007, p. 6). The person being helped in often called the “learner” or the “mentee”.

Natural mentors: People who are non-parents such as community members, teachers, coaches, ministers or extended family members who serve as mentor and assists in the development of adolescents. Natural mentoring relationships can provide a dependable source of support from someone who deeply cares and inspire others to do their best and make a difference in the choice they make (Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Portraiture: An approach to interviewing which involves focusing on a specific element of a context and the voice of the subject describing it, in order to gain an understanding of their sense of the reality involved (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture involves giving the fullest possible expression to the interviewee’s voice, through consideration of the context, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole.

Same-race mentoring: Mentoring in which the mentor and mentee are of the same race, indicated in many studies to improve the quality of mentoring and bring the mentoring involved closer to best practice in so far as same-race mentoring appears to facilitate the development of emotional support and caring between mentor and mentee (Eanes & Mansarray, 2007).
Social learning theory: A theory which posits that “personality is learned” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, 2001), and that imitation of role models is the best way to learn how to behave in certain situations.

Summary

This study seeks to determine if establishing a mentoring relationship between African American male high school principals and African American male at-risk high school students improves the social behavior, academic outcomes and self-esteem of the students involved. The study uses a portraiture approach to interviewing six subjects, two male African American principals and four male African American students, in order to gain the fullest possible understanding of how or whether the creation of a strong relationship between same-race dyads leads to better mentoring and subsequently to better social and academic outcomes for the students. On the basis of the mentoring literature, which has increasingly placed emphasis on improving the emotional character of the mentor-mentee relationship, it is believed that the same-race mentoring relationships holds promise for best practice mentoring, and for improving the situation of African American male at-risk students.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review and starts with a definition of and theoretical basis for mentoring. Characteristics of effective mentoring are then reviewed. Next, high school principals, African American principals, mentoring methods used by principals, positive results of these methods, and the challenges facing these principals are discussed. The discussion on principals and mentoring is followed by a section about African American students and mentoring. Next, several mentoring techniques and programs are reviewed including the Learning Leaders Mentoring Programs, natural mentors, and the learner centered movement. A brief discussion of mentoring and college preparedness is then included. The chapter finishes with sections on the principal-student relationship and the relationship between African American principals and students, followed by a brief conclusion section.

Mentoring

A mentor is defined by Avalon (2007) as “a person who nurtures, supports and cares for individuals or a small group of students” (p. 6). Mentors are “trusted guides who teach, sponsor, challenge and act as confidantes” and who “are committed, willing and able to invest sufficient time and effort to develop the next generation” of students, teachers or principals (Williams, Matthews, & Baugh, 2004, p. 55). Mentors are believed to be “wise, accomplished veterans who share their knowledge and experience with newcomers” (Williams, et al., p. 60). Mentors have also been defined as “active, dynamic, visionary, knowledgeable, and skilled individuals who have a committed philosophy that keeps the teaching and learning of students in focus” (Williams, et al., p. 60). Others see mentors as “a wise and trusted guide, adviser or counselor” whose duties include helping the mentee become acculturated to a school, and to provide support
so that the mentee can adjust him or herself to the new job (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). It is the mentor who steps in and helps a mentee build relationships at work, and with the powers that be (Lee, et al., 2006). By helping the mentee with both the little things—like finding out how to order supplies—and the big things—such as what path to follow to promotion—a mentor can help instill a professional vision into a mentee, ensuring their continued success in the profession (Lee, et al., 2006). Overall, mentors should be “people-oriented and secure” and trust their mentees (Heung-Ling, 2003, p. 34). They should also “take a personal interest in the mentees’ ideas and help them gain self-confidence” (Heung-Ling, p. 34).

Theoretical Basis for Mentoring

The concept of mentoring is based on a number of supporting theories (Britner and Balcazar, et al., 2006; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Wells-Wilbon & Holland, 2001; Williams, et al., 2004). Wells-Wilbon and Holland (2001) base mentoring in social learning theory, begun at Yale in the 1920s, and based on the idea that “personality is learned” (p. 4). Later, imitation was focused upon as “one of the most powerful socialization forces” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, p. 4). By means of positive reinforcement, imitative behavior can be developed. Bandura still later argues that “new behaviors can be acquired by simply watching a model’s” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, p. 4). According to the theory of vicarious reinforcement, “a child who sees a hard-working classmate praised by the teacher learns to try that behavior” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, p. 4). According to this model as well, “imitation of a models’ behavior when the model is no longer present is a powerful learning skill” (Wells-Wilbon & Holland, p. 5). In line with the growing emphasis in social learning theory on cognition, stories have also become the focus of study, as they represent “vehicles for learning and remembering” (Williams, et al., 2004, p. 61). Stories “contain packets of situated knowledge that assist interns [in education] to deal with
challenging situations of their own” (Williams, et al., p. 61). By hearing stories, mentees “learn to diagnose problems, reinterpret experiences and perceptions…and learn to talk like a full practitioner” (Williams, et al., p. 61). According to this theory, then, a mentor can serve as a role model to shape a student’s behavior over time. Studies have shown that even in school contexts, this learning occurs among mentees (Williams & Matthews, et al., 2004).

In the context of mentoring for at-risk youth, human attachment theory has begun to be used as a theoretical basis for mentoring (Williams, et al., p. 63). According to human attachment theory, how one experienced relationships in one’s childhood influences various working models of representations of relationships that one develops in one’s mind, this in turn dramatically impacting how one relates to others throughout one’s life (Britner, et al., 2006, p. 750). Mentoring has been found to not only compensate for insecure attachment patterns, but also to actually improve “the socioemotional quality of child-parent relationships” (Britner, et al., p. 750). One study, for example, found that, even in college students who reported strong relationships with their mothers, establishing a strong relationship with a mentor during college “predicted adjustment to college” (Britner, et al., p. 750). A variation on attachment theory is parental acceptance-rejection theory, which has “typically linked individuals’ self-reported levels of parental acceptance-rejection and their personality and functioning” (Britner, et al., p. 750). Because so many at-risk youth have been rejected by their parents, they have a special need for a mentor. According to social support theory, which argues that social support can provide resources to individuals that help them overcome disadvantages, “support from informal or formal mentors may help prevent youth from experiencing a range of negative outcomes” (Britner, et al., p. 751).
Host provocation theory, which explains “the diverse pathways to onset, persistence, escalation, and desistance of juvenile offending,” has also been enlisted to explain the benefits of mentoring (Britner, et al., p. 751). According to this theory, a combination of poor self concept and exposure to “antisocial provocations” can “drive at-risk youths to initiate, persist, and escalate offending” (Britner, et al., p. 751). In this framework, one of the primary means by which at-risk youth are blocked from antisocial behavior is monitoring. While parental monitoring is one way to limit youth exposure to risk, “good mentors, as good parents, may successfully monitor children, shielding them from antisocial provocations” (Britner, et al., p. 752). Finally, oppression theory outlines the various ways in which “the multiple dimensions of poverty, racial minority status, and disability combine to exacerbate an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and oppression” (Britner, et al., p. 752). Within the framework provided by this theory, “mentoring has been proposed as a liberating mechanism, especially if the mentor and the protégé have some common characteristics” (Britner, et al., p. 752). In addition to providing access to resources that help students overcome challenges, mentors can be good role models to at-risk students as well. Britner, et al. (2006) extract elements from all of the above theories to create sociomotivational theory as the basis of successful mentoring. According to this model, “the degree to which the mentoring program and the relationships built within it will positively impact youth adjustment and achievements depends on the satisfaction of relatedness, autonomy, and competence needs connected with the setting” (Britner, et al., p. 752). The overall emphasis of this model is that the mentoring relationship must assist the mentee in developing personal autonomy, and in making his or her own decisions about important life events.

Natural Mentors

Another line of research argues that there are a number of so-called “natural mentors” in
the lives of at-risk adolescent African Americans that are not being sufficiently utilized. And yet studies have reported that African American youth who are supported by “natural mentors” have lower levels of depression, and “a larger support network, excluding their mentors” (Britner, et al., p. 755). Natural mentors did not limit their interactions with their mentees, because they naturally assumed the responsibility to care for at-risk African-American adolescents wherever there was a need (Smith, 2006).

Another study found that mentoring within the context of Big Brother programs “resulted in grade improvements and reductions in voluntary school absences” (Britner, et al., p. 758). Supporting the idea that mentoring can help adolescents is anecdotal evidence from mentees and mentors. One mentee reported only realizing later on in life that his mentor “did make an impact on his life” (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007, p. 10). Another story describes how a mentor gradually developed a relationship with an at-risk high school student over time, eventually helping her enter technical school (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007). Big Brother-based mentoring, primarily designed to “improving a child’s perspective on life” (Eanes & Mansaray, p. 5), is often cited as having positive impact on at-risk adolescents. Big Brother “now employs more than a quarter million community volunteers” and continues to expand its services, serving as a model for mentoring for at-risk adolescents (Avalon, 2007). The Leadership Program, developed at the Larchmont Elementary School was a mentoring program designed to show children that someone cares for them (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007).

**Effective Mentors**

The literature indicates that finding the right mentor for a particular mentee remains a difficult challenge (Avalon, 2007; Heung-Ling, 2003; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Lee, et al., 2006; Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006; Williams, et al., 2004). A good mentor needs a number of
rare and particular skills, involving both a high level of knowledge of the ins and outs of a school, and “responsive” personal characteristics as well (Ramani, et al., p. 404). Moreover, “some key skills required when mentoring others include listening and the ability to give positive as well as negative feedback” (Ramani, et al., p. 404). Studies indicate that due to lack of skills of various kinds, many mentoring relationships falter, and many mentees end up being disappointed by their relationship with their mentor. This may partly be due to the fact that up until recently mentoring was envisioned formalistically, as a professional advice service, without due consideration of the relational aspects of mentoring. Others have emphasized that, even where a relationship is forming, certain boundaries must be maintained to keep the mentor-mentee relationship professional (Ramani, et al., 2006). As a result, many mentors failed to create the kind of relationship with mentees which later research has found to be the basis of mentoring success. There also remains a dispute in the literature over whether or not mentor and mentee should be culturally similar, or whether difference can “foster greater mutual growth of the mentor and mentee” (Ramani, et al., p. 405). The primary conclusion of the general literature on mentoring is that no one is capable of being everything that is required of a mentor without training and experience. Most mentors “need to be trained…to be aware of the complexity and essence of an authentic mentoring relationship” (Heung-Ling, 2003, p. 40). Mentors must build a relationship by developing “comfort level, respect, openness, encouragement, continuous support, frequent contact…and expert knowledge and level of commitment” (Heung-Ling, p. 40).

African Americans as Principals

Fifty years after Brown v. The Board of Education, the number of African American principals in U.S. schools remains disproportionately small (McCray, Wright & Beachum, 2006;
Littky, Schen, 2003). Moreover, it could be said that because Brown and dozens of rulings that followed it mandated desegregation, and white administrators replaced black principals in order to manage this transition, an inadvertent effect of Brown was to reduce the number of African American leaders in education (McCray, et al., 2006) Studies show that today McCray stated “African American principals find themselves facing almost insurmountable odds in trying to attain principalships”. Then, when an African American principal is appointed, he or she is inevitably placed in “mostly urban, segregated, and underfunded schools” (McCray, et al., p. 248). As these schools also “have scarce resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers and student underachievement” it is almost as if these principals are being set up for failure (McCray, et al., 2006). Because of the scarcity of African American principals and that, when African Americans become principals, they are placed in positions designed to fail (McCray, et al., 2006), it seems that “lingering effects” of Brown may continue to limit the potential of African American principals. A different approach to the problem of African American principals is taken by studies that follow African American principals in their journey through a primarily white educational bureaucracy (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). Studies show that African American leaders, in any field, have “less job discretion and reported feeling less accepted than white managers” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 51). As a result, “ethnic differences between leader and followers may result in exchanges that may be detrimental to the organization’s goals” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 51). In Madsen and Mabokela case study of an African American principal, the principal reported that in fulfilling his mandate to engage in educational leadership, this often meant trying to make white teachers more culturally responsive to African American students. Also, he “often had to address discipline inequities to ensure that African American students were treated fairly” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 52). But when the principal raised these
sensitive issues, the teachers “resented his authority and often dismissed his suggestions” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 52). The fact that African American leaders have values that conflict with mainstream teachers only exacerbates this issue. Apart from being result oriented, African American principals have more responsibilities in dealing with other social issues concerning students (Jerlando 2007).

They are responsible for dealing with issues of drug abuse affecting the students which are racial oriented (Christie 2005, p.78). Finally, the fact that African American leaders used a “color conscious” leadership style in school (Jones 2002; Flora, 2003) to reduce inequities in treatment of African American students rubbed against the grain of mainstream opinion that “color blind” was the best way to deal with racial matters (Jones 2002, p. 19). All of these tensions meant that African American principals had to engage in a lot of “image management,” entailing working to counteract stereotypical expectations and misperceptions about their leadership qualifications (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 49). As a result of negative views by white colleagues, the principals “often spent much time and energy having to socially construct their roles to focus on one-on-one leader-member relationships” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 49). According to Jones (2002), these issues become particularly difficult when an African American principal detects a racist policy and tries to devise a way to change it.

Many African American principals view themselves as advocates, cultural brokers, or role models for African American students (Madsen & Mabokela, p.54). This often means that they are harder on African American students than they are on white students (Jerlando 2007, p. 165); but at the same time this means that they are role models for all educators in how to deal with African American students, and thus, “sensitize their European American colleagues about racial matters” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 48). Overall, the principals in one study were “strong in
their commitment and were willing to make additional efforts for students” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 54). Jerlando (2007) also notes that, while promotion of the interests of African American students is a positive step in the right direction, the fact that African American leaders felt they had to act in this way also created self-conflict (Jerlando et al., 2007, p. 103). African American leaders “struggled with the complexity of race and its implications on their ability to lead” (Madsen & Mabokela, p. 47). Moreover, as noted by Kofi (1999), “they often noted that their legitimacy was questioned concerning whether they were going to be loyal to school participants’ collective interests or promote an ambivalent relationship with African American students”. From subset of the data in Kofi’s study (1999), which focused on responses of teachers to a curriculum innovation and behavior analysis illustrated the differences that distinguished the role of the administrator/bureaucrat from the ethno-humanist role as described by two African-American principals on how they carry out their work.

The author found that the principals often moved back and forth amid the two identities. They hardly ever focused only on the bureaucrat/administrator role or on the ethno-humanist role (Kofi, 1999, p. 107). African American principals had a great responsibility in running ethnically diverse urban schools (Jerlando et al., 2007). In these schools as portrayed in Jerlando’s work, African American teachers had to fight against the race boundaries, which had already been established by their white, and European American colleagues. Not only do African American teachers have to fight against race boundaries, but another conflict has emerged in the lives of African American principals and it involves generational and historical issues. African American educators who emerged during the civil rights era are dedicated to the civil rights commitment to “uplift the race,” an ethos “pioneered by their predecessors in the 19th and early 20th centuries” going back to Frederick Douglass (Loder, 2005, p. 247). Many African
American female principals in particular view their work as a calling, combining spiritual values, community activism and religiosity (Loder 2005; Morse, 2006). By contrast, younger Generation X or Hip Hop generation African Americans hold quite different views about their role in American life. Born in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement, having likely faced fewer instances of overt racism, and having experienced integration and opportunity, these principals are said to enjoy a “generational privilege” resulting in the fact that they do not necessarily view racism as a problem (Loder, p. 253).

According to life course theory, derived from the field of sociology, especially with regard to the use of the concept of cohort, which states that “people who are born at or around the same time experience similar social and historical events which may impact their role transitions in similar ways” (Loder, p. 347), there is, as a result of this history, a gulf between the generations. As a result of this gulf (Loder, 2005; Rubin, 2001; Townsell, & Kritsonis, 2006), found cases in which older African American principals had expectations of younger principals that were not met, or they thrust principalships upon younger candidates who then did not have the same uplifting goals for the job. Also, because younger candidates encountered fewer structural barriers, they cultivated mentors less, and relied heavily upon “newly developed principal training and induction programs designed to groom new aspirants” (Loder, p. 259).

Unlike their older counterparts, younger candidates “know where they wanted to go and how they intended to get there” and “recounted their early career aspirations in a manner that was self-directed and assured” (Loder, p. 261). This “diverging of generations” has itself created tension among African American principals. Loder (2005) and O’Mahoney (2003) argue that “one of the most formidable threats to keeping the tradition of activism vibrant in African American education is the lack of institutional memory that exists within younger African
American…educators concerning the struggles it took to promote social change” (Loder, p. 262).

Another researcher worried that “large numbers of black children remain warehoused in inner-city schools, sadly, many of them taught by black teachers who have little institutional memory of activism” (Morse, 2006). This has “left an increasing number of younger African American…educators unprepared politically to recognize and deal with new forms of racism” (Morse, 2006). This itself may be why so many African American principals report being frustrated at “their inability to promote meaningful change in contemporary African American schools” (Morse, 2006; O’Mahoney, 2003). This too may be another reason why mentoring for African American men and women principals is so necessary (Ullmann, 2006). African American principals who view themselves as advocates and role models for African American students must practice sound mentoring principles. The job of high school principal has, in recent years, become a “position of significantly expanded duties and responsibilities” (Scott, 2005, p. 1). While principals continue to practice managerial duties involved in the day-to-day running of schools, they are also asked to be inspirational leaders to teachers and students, to ensure that both achieve educational and personal goals (Scott, 2005).

As a result, principals have become increasingly involved in instructional leadership, that is, they are held responsible for the academic and overall well-being of the students under their supervision. Indeed, Scott (2005) argues that “purposeful educational leadership in the schools occurs when principals understand the needs of the school and are actively involved in the school’s work” (p. 5). As leaders, principals must focus on the quality of the teaching and learning occurring in school. As research has determined that social and academic successes are linked (Scott, 2005), principals must also oversee the general development of students as people. In a survey of principals of inner-city schools primarily serving minorities, Cole-Henderson
(2000) found that most principals viewed two outcomes as critical to measuring the success of their jobs, “increased self-esteem and increased achievement as measured by standardized test scores” (Cole-Henderson, p. 88) of the students in the school. The survey also determined that schools that were able to serve students in this way had done so because of “strong leadership, collegial climate, and continuous commitment to improvement” (Cole-Henderson, p. 88). Overall, then, a consensus has been achieved, in principals’ minds, about what schools must do to create successful students. Most of all, principals generally agree that “to be successful, urban schools in low-income areas must address the needs of the whole child as well as the child’s family and community” (Cole-Henderson, p. 89). In sum, principals now accept that they are primarily responsible for the ultimate life-success of many of their students.

Mentoring Programs for Principals

Until recently, most new principals were left to sink or swim when entering the profession. Most principals learned their jobs by means of ad hoc on-the-job training, a process so stressful that such learning is directly attributable to high attrition among principals (Holloway, 2004). The notorious isolation of the principalship has also fed high attrition rates (Littky & Schen, 2003). More recently, researchers have come to understand that all principals, and especially minority principals, need mentoring—both to become better principals, but also to survive in challenging, isolating jobs (Littky & Schen, 2003).

To that end, a number of mentoring models for principals have emerged. Research shows that there has been a “rise in the frequency and depth of mentoring programs for school administrators, in particular building principals” (Hall, 2008, p. 449). These programs have developed out of teacher mentoring programs, which were instituted as early as the 1980s to reduce the attrition rate of new teachers, which was as high as 50% in some urban schools.
(Tillman, 2003). In the context of mentoring between teachers or between principals, the definition of mentoring is slightly altered to focus on a “learning partnership between two or more individuals who wish to share or develop a mutual interest” (Tillman, p. 227). In the context of this relationship, a mentor can shift from counselor to role model, from sponsor to personal champion. Such programs as the First-Time Campus Administrators Academy in Texas or the California School Leadership Academy have been created to formalize mentoring for all principals, in order to better ensure their persistence in the profession (Hall, 2008). The primary reason why such formal programs have been developed is that ad hoc and informal mentoring, or mentoring between untrained individuals, has been found to be not only inadequate, but also capable of being damaging to new principals (Hall, 2008). Without formal support, the time constraints, the problem of mentor-mentee mismatching, and the absence of clear goals, all have been found to derail mentoring on a regular basis (Hall, 2008). Thus, “establishing a formal program as part of a professional development plan is crucial for the success of the mentoring process” for principals (Hall, p. 451).

One such model in Texas, which included “a schedule of seminars and mentor-guided internship experiences,” was found to greatly improve the leadership skills of all mentees, and all entered into principalships (Holloway, p. 87). Like every formal mentoring program, this one succeeded because time was taken to match mentor and mentee, there were clear goals and expectations, and “an honest and trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee built on confidentiality” developed during the course of the program (Holloway, p. 88). Another formal program is the Head Teacher Mentoring Pilot Scheme developed in England, which was a year-long program designed to help principals adjust to their jobs (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). A formal mentoring program was introduced in New York City as early as 1991, in which retired
principals were matched with new principals, entailing contact about five times a month, and a range of group meetings (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Studies have indicated that all these programs were successful in helping principals lead better, and stay in their jobs longer (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). The Singapore model of mentoring for principals, developed in 1984, is another well-known model which has received support in the literature (Lim, 2003). The Singapore model in particular is based on the idea that trust is what makes a mentoring relationship thrive (Lim, 2003), and indeed principals learn how to trust through the mentoring process itself. As a result of the growth of such programs, it is now required that principals take formal mentoring programs in over half the states (Wallace Foundation, 2007).

To further improve mentor programming, some researchers have devised models to describe the various phases of a full mentoring process. O’Mahoney (2003) charts out the various phases that all principal mentees go through, in becoming inducted into their jobs. At first, they are filled with “anticipation and idealization” (O’Mahoney, p. 40). During this phase, it was found that “the principals in their previous schools” had provided strong, if informal mentoring (O’Mahoney, p. 40) and were responsible for shaping their views. On the other hand, many young principals witnessed poor or unethical leadership by prior principals, which often left them without guidance with regard to best practice. During Phase Two, or the immersion phase, many new principals felt that “they had been cast adrift and were alone” (O’Mahoney, p. 40). Few principals in this phase report having a “trained assigned mentor” and often had to call up their old principals, reverting to informal mentoring. Many principals in this phase “didn’t know who to turn to” (O’Mahoney, p. 40). In Phase Three, or the establishment phase, principals began to align themselves with other like-minded principals and developed a sense of trust with them, so that they could develop their expertise. Finally, in Phase Four, or the consolidation
phase, principals “no longer needed an assigned mentor” and instead were able to identify various “knowledge mentors” among their peers or colleagues, and sought them out as they with. These mentors served as role models which they emulated, further contributing to the consolidation of their practice (O’Mahoney, 2003). Overall, then, a model like this indicates that the process by which a principal becomes capable is difficult, and mentors play a valuable role in seeing them through to becoming effective principals. Principals who are indeed effective have seen positive results.

**Positive Results of Effective Principal Mentoring**

Results from studies also indicate positive and negative elements of principal mentoring programs. For example, studies indicate that mentee principals are “most appreciative of mentors who provide emotional support and reassurance within an informal and friendly relationship” (Hobson, & Sharp 2005; O’Mahoney, 2003). They also favor mentors “who are able to provide practical advice and assist them in problem-solving” (Hobson & Sharp, p. 35). Also, if the mentor and mentee were well matched, the odds of developing a successful mentorship were greatly enhanced (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). At present, well-matched does not appear to entail ethnic or racial similarity, as studies in New York have found that the “gender and ethnicity of …mentors and principals involved appeared to have no impact on the mentoring experience” (Hobson & Sharp; O’Mahoney, 2003). In the New York study, mentees also appreciated mentors who had “administrative expertise,” and “mentors who had a good knowledge of the school system” (Hobson & Sharp, p. 37). Studies also indicate that, especially among principal mentor-mentee relationships, finding adequate time remains a serious problem, so much so that strategies have in turn been developed to circumvent time issues. Thus, principal mentoring often involves one mentor and several mentees, as in New York, or involves “less frequent meetings”
and greater use of technology such as email (Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006). Mentoring by principals has induced many positives, but the mentoring process is not easy for principals to master. In addition to the previously mentioned barriers that African American principals face, those who wish to mentor face additional challenges specific to mentoring.

Challenges of Principal Mentoring

Mentoring principals is distinctly different from other types of mentoring, bringing with it unique challenges. For example, the literature on mentoring principals has, in recent years, merged with leadership studies, so that principal mentoring today is primarily concerned with transforming new principals into leaders (Mullen, 2006). As a result, principal mentoring and leadership mentoring are all but synonymous terms in the literature. Also, because of the rapid change in the nature of the principialship, principal mentoring has also increasingly come to focus on what is termed lifelong mentoring, or “a continuum of learning and teaching activities through which an individual becomes enabled, empowered and self-actualized” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006, p. 291). According to this model, principals must learn how to be able to constantly evolve and change, given the complexity of their jobs. The special demands of principal mentoring also place great pressure on finding acceptable mentors. In general, “leadership mentors (must) be carefully selected and trained to ensure that the relationship between mentor and mentee is mutually beneficial” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, p. 291). Much mentoring of principals is focused on leadership, which includes developing particular skills in mentees, including “leadership qualities, communicating well with others, being able to think outside the box and being risk-takers” (Harris, Ballenger & Leonard, 2004, p. 159). Most of all, the shape of mentoring changes, as mentors must understand “the importance of mentees being
engaged in ways that enable them to lead” (Harris, et al., p. 157). For this reason, leadership mentoring usually occurs between mentor and mentee who are relative equals, and whose relationship is dynamic as it “changes over time as the relationship matures and as both the mentee’s and the mentor’s experience and expertise develop” (Hobson & Sharp, p. 26).

Mentoring for African American principals has been found to demand even more particular concern for the above issues. While the above studies found that commonality or difference of race or ethnicity between mentor and mentee had no impact on the quality of the mentoring relationship, in the context of the historically inferior role that African American leaders have played in education, and abiding by critical race theory, some researchers are not so sure (Jones, 2002, p. 8). Indeed, studies of leaders of color have found that African American principals may lead differently than their European American counterparts. In general, “an African American principal’s ethnic identity shaped the social constructs of his or her administrative role and defined his or her mission for schools” (Jones, p. 8). Again, the fact that African American principals “have a strong commitment to African American students and a deep understanding that these students can learn” changes the nature of their leadership (Jones, p. 8). Thus, African American principals appear to be much more conscious of being role models to students, and, as principals, developing much more direct mentor-like relationships with African American students (Jones, 2002). African American principals also lead differently because they prefer collaborative work, rather than power-based models of leadership that “rely too heavily on the individual perspectives of the Eurocentric view of leadership” (Jones, 2002, p. 8). By contrast, the way that African American principals socialize is based on their ethnic background, which entails beliefs about kinship and culture, family and community. African Americans in general hold “ethnic kinship” ideas about the relationship between leader and follower “of the
same racial affiliation” (Jones, p. 21). For this reason, many African American teachers and
students viewed their African American principal “as a mother/father figure in the organization” (Jones, p. 21). In a case study of an African American teacher accused of hurting a child, the
teacher reported that the African American principal immediately believed her, trusted her, and
protected her, “the way my parents would protect us as children” (Jones, p. 21).

For African American followers, “strong racial affiliation” between follower and leader
may be enough to establish a consensus of credibility (Jones, 2002, p. 21). Also, African
American teachers and presumably students under an African American principal give
“unconditional respect to their principals” (Jones, p. 18). They also gave unconditional trust to
African American principals from the start, while European American teachers and students took
some time to trust the principal as leader. Jones (2002) argues that this response to African
American leaders is based on a concept of reverence of leadership that “is biblical in origin and
manifested itself into the cultural practices of people of color” (p. 18). Because of this model,
African American followers in particular believe that an African American principal leads well
when he or she pays as much attention to the social side of school as to academics, and works to
“empower people through self-determination and self-worth” (Jones, p. 18). African American
principals mentoring African American students.

As noted previously (Jones, 2002), African American principals must take on different
roles if they hope to help close the achievement gap for African American students, and help
them lead better lives. Norfleet and Kritsonis, et al. (2006) argue that the key to improving
student achievement and prospects in predominately African American-serving schools is
through culturally relevant practices. As noted in the literature, for the purpose of teaching or
mentoring African American students, teachers or principals need to “adjust their teaching style
to accommodate teaching in terms of caring, using other-mothering skills, demonstrating a strong belief in African American students…(and) adopting the teaching profession as a calling” (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., p. 2). Other mothering involves utilizing traditional ways of relating in the African American community between adults and children without parents. This involves establishing a sense of kinship and emotional attachment to children, and looking after student development as if they were a parent (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., 2006). This concept corresponds to Boykin’s argument, based on his formulation of the characteristics of the African American learner, that “African American students might learn best in an environment whose style is relational and personal, like an extended family” (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., p. 4). On a practical level, this involves allowing students to learn collaboratively, and communally, and developing knowledge in a reciprocal fashion (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., 2006).

In spite of the fact that a number of mentoring programs for students have been created, reports indicate that too many minority students are either on waiting lists for mentors, or not being offered mentoring at all (Gehrke & Jenkins, et al., 2006). Not only are there not enough mentors to help minority mentees, but “18% of mentor-mentee matches terminate prematurely and 70% of people who inquire about the program do not complete the screening and training process to become a mentor” (Gehrke & Jenkins, et al., p. 25). As a result, 85% of mentoring for minority students is currently informal, with only 17% being formal, involving Big Brother, for example. Thus, while mentoring of students is favored in theory, practice lags behind.

More importantly, the literature on African American student achievement has developed a noncognitive model for academic achievement. This means that “there are seven noncognitive variables that are especially predictive of academic achievement among students or ethnic or racial minority background” (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., p. 5). Most importantly, when
mentoring or teaching African American students, equal attention must be paid to social support as to academics (Norfleet & Kritsonis, et al., 2006). Again, mentoring African American students involves developing almost familial relationships with them. Li and Lal (2006) examined a case study of a principal directly mentoring African American students. In this study, the mentoring relationship developed between principal and students involved both formal mentoring, and spontaneous mentoring. That is, while some structured schedule of meetings was created, many of the contacts between principal and student were spontaneous, with “two people drawn together by fortune and mutual interest” (Li & Lal, p. 318).

Li and Lal (2006) relate such mentoring to fathering, particularly related to the “new nurturant father” model that has developed in recent years. According to the literature, the new nurturant father is “deeply involved in his children’s daily social and emotional activities” (Li & Lal, p. 318). Li and Lal (2006) found that many principal mentors conceived of their role and practice as similar to that of the new nurturant father role. For Li and Lal (2006) this convergence of ideas creates an opportunity to redress one of the most serious problems that many African American and minority students have: lack of fathers in the home. Moreover, “daddy-absent households are common in poverty-stricken inner-city neighborhoods in the United States” (Li & Lal, p. 319). Educational research over the past generation has “been nearly unanimous in their findings: fathers matter” (Li & Lal, p. 319). Research has shown that “the presence of a new nurturant father and his daily involvement in the child caring and rearing has proven to be beneficial to children’s cognitive development” (Li & Lal, p. 326). By contrast, students who “lived with only one parent had lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations, poorer attendance records and higher dropout rates than students who lived with both
parents” (Li & Lal, p. 323). Studies have also shown that “children who have fathers or father figures involved in their education perform better than those who do not” (Li & Lal, p. 323).

As a result of the strength and depth of these views, African American principals often “face loyalty issues in the organization that clash with their own socialized beliefs” (Jones, 2002, p. 9). That is, European American teachers and students are much less likely to offer them unconditional trust, and may feel uncomfortable with them in many ways (Jones, 2002, p. 18).

To facilitate African American principal leadership in diverse schools, Chemers’ model of how to lead in an ethnically diverse workplace was enlisted to provide a model for optimal functioning (Steven, 2004, p. 155). According to this model, leadership involves image management and relationship development (Jones, 2002, p. 11). Thus, African American leaders must work hard to establish a level of credibility which will inspire others to follow him or her to a collective goal as stated in Jones 2002. When building relationships, African American principals “must be sensitive to workplace differences among followers and must be able to reduce negative stereotypes as well” (Jones, p. 10). At present, however, Jones (2002) finds that many European American teachers under African American principals feel “left out from daily interactions with their African American principals” (Jones, p. 29). This in turn “made them feel uneasy in their exchanges with their principals” (Jones, p. 30).

Jones’ (2002) study on the different responses of African American and European American followers provides the basis for considering the benefits of African American principals mentoring African American students. While European American teachers and students face a number of difficulties with African American principals, Jones (2002) and Flora, (2003) demonstrates that African American principals can establish extraordinarily deep, culturally-rooted, and ethnically-grounded relationships with African American students. Based
on “kinship” principles, it can be inferred that African American principals have an advantage in establishing trusting, supportive and motivating relationships with African American students (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002, p. 73).

Students and Mentoring

The literature has reported, and some presented above, that a number of mentoring programs established for students have been successful in improving both student attitudes about school, and their overall self-esteem (Avalon, 2007; Crutcher, 2007; Britner & Balcazar, et al., 2006; Dawes & Dawes, 2005; Eanes & Mansaray, 2007; Gehrke & Jenkins, et al., 2006; Glomb & Buckley, et al., 2006; George & Aronson, 2003; Hall, 2007; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In these studies, the most pertinent element of mentoring is the creation of a “strong personal relationship” between mentor and mentee (Dawes & Dawes, 2005, p. 48). In mentoring with students, personal attention to the student, and establishing “love, caring and closeness” are critical to the success of the program (Avalon, 2007, p. 11). Mentors of students routinely report that one-on-one conversations with them “caused them to fall in love with their students” (Avalon, p. 12). Moreover, “an integral part of building close relationships with students was the high expectations for students and the refusal to give up on them” (Avalon, p. 12). In one study of mentoring through the Big Brother organization it was found that among minority students “young people in the mentored cohort were 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs, were 27% less prone to using alcohol, and 53% less likely to be truant from school than those in the control cohort” (Dawes & Dawes, p. 48). Overall, “the youth who received mentoring support reported an increase in positive attitudes to school and family and better relationships with their peers” (Dawes & Dawes, 2005, p. 48).
One focus of many mentoring programs for at-risk students is keeping them on track to go to college. Faced with the statistic that only 47% of low-income students enroll in college, these programs have also proliferated (George & Aronson, 2003). The Pathways to College program is a mentoring program designed for low-income, underserved students, which tries to get them back on track toward college. The New Directions for At-Risk Senior high students is another mentoring program, from Texas, designed for the same purpose. Based on the literature which has found that “the most effective intervention programs that promote college access pay attention to the students’ cultural background and attempt to incorporate this background in the structure and content of the program,” (George & Aronson, p. 16), this program tries to help ethnic students overcome and at least gain insight into cultural issues and barriers, and instruct them on what they must do to get into college (George & Aronson, 2003). In some contexts, such as at the Frederick Douglass Academy in New York City, this involves working to improve school climate, and to teach students “to respect each other and work together for the uplifting of the African American community through close-knit relationships with staff” (George & Aronson, p. 16).

In other schools, the program involves redressing inadequacies in the school’s preparation of minority students for college. Finally, studies of students trying to negotiate “white” schools have found that many such students come to resist the culture of the school and develop a counterculture to set themselves apart from the mainstream (George & Aronson, 2003. This tendency too must be curtailed by culturally sensitive mentoring. Finally, The Hollywood High School Each one Reach One mentoring program, implemented in 1996, focused on Latino at-risk students, and provides guidance by mentors to help these students find a way to enter college. The results of a study of this program found that “informal mentoring
relationships…were influential in helping these students pursue academic success in high school and college” (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006, p. 348). Thus, there is a growing body of literature confirming the value of mentoring in helping minority students towards both academic and life success. The specific question remains, does mentoring African American principals help them better mentor African American students?

*African American Students*

On an anecdotal level, fellow students report that African American students are “very complacent with their education and it wasn’t much of a priority” (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007, p. 1). Another student stated that “some preferred to work at McDonald’s all their life, as long as they could sport the latest gear and the most expensive shoes” (Eanes & Mansaray, p. 1). These anecdotes indicate that, either because they do not have aspirations for college, or because they cannot see the larger picture, many African American students underperform in school. One explanation for this lack of interest in school is that these students are being influenced by “a sub-culture that minimizes intellect and castigates conformity” (Neely, 2003, p. 12). Others argue that African American students “come from areas that do not focus on…intellectual growth at a young age” (Neely, p. 12). Still others argue that African American students, by the time they reach high school, have internalized so much negativity that they divorce themselves from the ascribed goals of the mission statements of schools (Neely, 2003; Rubin, 2001). As a result, one teacher did “all she can to get them to see the bigger picture of life” (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007, p. 1). But the “bigger picture” itself may account for lack of commitment to education. Certainly, African American students see the results of unemployment in their communities, and may question the value of an education.
The bigger picture may also convince African American students that the system as a whole is stacked against them. Many African American students report that discrimination “inhibits their progress in school” (Neely, 2003, p. 19). Others believe that teachers have developed negative attitudes towards them, resulting in their poor grades. Still others “tend to stay away from situations where they may get embarrassed” (Neely, 2003; Walker, & Byas, 2003), especially where there is a chance of what Steele calls “stereotype threat.” Overall, “the effect of this behavior is that students approach learning and school with a fairly low feeling of self worth” (Neely, p. 21). Often, African American students misbehave in school simply to be removed from potentially embarrassing situations in classrooms. (Neely, 2003; Wimberley, 2002). Additional societal factors may also influence the persistence of the African American achievement gap. Studies have found that “children who grow up apart from their biological fathers do less well, on average, than children who grow up with both natural parents” (Neely, 2003, p. 14). These students, by and large, are less likely than others to both complete high school, and to hold down a good job. There is also an achievement gap between children in one- and two-parent households, and children raised by single mothers in particular are at risk of school failure (Neely, 2003; Wimberley, 2002). One reason for this may be that children from one-parent homes tend to move more often, disrupting children’s education. The fact that at each new school the child must “begin the socialization process again” (Neely, p. 16).

African American Students and Mentoring

A number of mentoring programs for students have focused on students of color. A model for cross-cultural mentoring has been developed for mentors and mentees of different race or ethnicity (Crutcher, 2007, p. 21). Studies have found that “a lack of cultural awareness on the part of a mentor can adversely influence the quality of a mentoring relationship (Crutcher, p. 32).
As a result, researchers have called for more training in cultural competency among all mentors. Some researchers argue that mentoring must be modeled on traditional forms of elder-youth interaction in various ethnic cultures (Hall, 2007). In the context of Native American culture, for example, mentoring is based on kinship and clan, which “were built upon the idea that individuals owed each other certain kinds of behaviors and that if each person performed his or her task properly, society would function” (Hall, p. 16). As noted above, Jones (2002) found similar traditional cultural bases for mentoring between African American adults and students. Indeed, while some argue that mentor and mentee ethnicity is irrelevant, or can be circumvented, others claim that “matching children with adult mentors on the basis of similar personal traits is an important component of successful mentoring programs” (Glomb & Buckley, et al., 2006, p. 31).

Contributing to the development of mentoring designed specifically for African American students is the proliferation of mentoring programs designed to help “maltreated” or at-risk students (Britner & Balcazar, et al., 2006, p. 753). At present, however, “the research on mentoring youth who have disabilities is limited” and some studies have found that mentoring for youth with socioemotional problems has not produced measurable results (Britner & Balcazar, et al., p. 755). Some studies of mentoring of at risk youth find that the benefits of the programs were primarily functional, as, for example, in one study, the mentoring “linked young mothers with resources and information not readily available in their existing support networks” (Britner & Balcazar, et al., p. 755). Zalaquett and Lopez (2004) describe a case study where everyone at the school, including the principal, took on mentoring roles, to improve the experience and prospects of inner city youth (in this case, Latino). The linchpin of this program was that “mentor principals” were involved, creating mentoring relationships throughout the
school (Zalaquett & Lopez, p. 56). By using mentoring to create a culture of trust throughout the school, the program under study was successful in improving the college and life prospects of minority students.

The Principal-Student Relationship

While research has promoted the idea that enlightened leadership among principals of low-income schools is primarily responsible for student success (Kofi, 1999; Jones, 2002; Hobson, & Sharp, 2005), in actual practice, the relationship between principal and student has not materialized (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Dunbar, 2002; Loder, 2005; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002; McCray et al., 2006; Scott, 2005; Walker, 2003). Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) examined zero tolerance policies and how they were implemented by principals in inner-city schools, because “a disproportionately high number of African American and Latino students (were) negatively affected by this policy” (p. 83). While the study then proceeded to discuss why zero tolerance policies were so inadequately carried out, primarily due to principal misgivings about the policy, an overlooked negative outcome of principal implementation of the policy was that principals and students communicated less, and there was a breakdown of trust between them. Though Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) did not consider whether or not the principals involved in disproportionate punishment of African American students were white or African American, the results of the study suggest a disconnect between principals and students which is all too common in inner-city high schools. For this reason, other researchers Glomb and Buckley, (2006), have examined whether or not placing African American principals in inner-city schools with African American students would improve the outcomes of the students.

As a result, some researchers seek out exemplary African American principals who were able to help their students succeed, and try to understand how they were successful (Walker,
2003). Researcher has found that, by and large, in the implementation of the policy, the civil rights of African American students were violated, and “public perception that African American and Latino youth are somehow more prone to engaging in criminal and juvenile acts” was thereby reinforced (Dunbar & Villarruel, p. 86).

African American Principals and Students

The bond created between African American principals and African American students is strong, but problematic (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007; Lord, 2005; Neely, 2003; Townsell & Kritsonis, 2006; Wimberley, 2002; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). While acknowledging that “African Americans have always understood the importance of an education”, Lord (2005) acknowledges that “finding the best learning environment for our children…has become increasingly tough” (Lord, p. 190). The current status of the African American student in U.S. high schools presents an imposing challenge to African American principals. The literature on African American student outcomes indicates an achievement disparity between African American and white students. Many reasons associated with African American students’ attitudes are cited for this so-called achievement gap and were described in the African American Students subsection.

Increasingly, the literature suggests that African American principals may be what are needed to help African American students achieve more in schools (Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006, Scott, 2005; Wimberley, 2002). Indeed, studies have shown that “social relationships play a significant role in helping students make the transition from high school to postsecondary training” (Wimberley, 2002, p. 5). Mentoring between personnel and students is one of the most important avenues by which relationships in school are formed. Indeed, so important are relationships that the National Association of Secondary School Principal (NASSP) recommends
“that every high school student have a Personal Adult Advocate to help personalize their educational experience” (Wimberley, p. 6). This is because “all students need to know that at least one adult in the school continually cares about them and their future after high school” (Wimberley, p. 6). Not only do such advocates help students become more engaged in school life, but they also “facilitate students’ relationships with other adults and students in the school” (Wimberley, p. 6).

Such advocates are especially important for African American students because, studies have shown, these students are “less likely than whites to talk with their teachers outside of class” (Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006; Scott, 2005; Wimberley, 2002). Also, in low-income schools, such personnel may be the only source for information about how to proceed to college. Overall, then, not only are relationships of critical importance to African American students, but Wimberley’s (2002) study of one school discovered that relationships “can be developed and shaped in many ways and across numerous opportunities to enhance educational expectations” among minority students (Wimberley, p. 13).

Whether or not African American students can develop these trusting relationships with white teachers or principals remains an issue. Some African American students report that white teachers often treat them in a patronizing way (Neely, 2003). Failure by white teachers in all these areas is viewed by African American students as a symptom of racism, further alienating them from their teachers. Indeed, where such tacit racism is detected, many African American students respond negatively, and will misbehave, while others will “chose absence rather than sit through a class period with a disliked teacher” (Neely, p. 22). These issues are exacerbated by findings which indicate that African American students in particular “tend to personalize relationships, which makes the attitude of the teacher instrumental in ensuring affirmative
participation” (Neely, p. 29). Indeed, Townsell and Kritsonis (2006) argue that African American students might learn best in the context of synnoetics, or personal knowledge. Such knowledge is “indirectly learned” “from experience” and refers to “the insight that a person has into his own being and the insight that the same person has into the lives of other people” based on his or her experience (Townsell & Kritsonis, p. 3).

All of the above—the importance of relationships, the need to compensate for lack of parental involvement, the problems white teachers have teaching African Americans, and cultural issues—suggest that African American principals may be ideal candidates for providing the best and most effective mentoring for African American students. Indeed, mentoring has been found to be of great help to minority students (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Mentoring has been found to be particularly important for high school students moving on into college. It is therefore necessary to examine mentoring as the possible key to bringing together African American principals and African American students.

The African American Principal-Student Relationship and Mentoring

In studies of the mentoring of at-risk students, students indicate that principals themselves are getting personally involved (Avalon, 2007; Harris & Ballenger, et al., 2004; Jones, 2002; Li & Lal, 2006; Lim, 2003; Lord, 2005; Morris, 2002; Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In one case study, “the principal herself...chose to become a mentor” to students (Avalon, 2007, p. 17) in order to signal to all the importance of mentoring in school. The literature on good principals repeatedly reveals that principals are “modeling competencies” in many different ways in schools, for all stakeholders, including students (Harris, et al., 2004, p. 178). Not only are principals increasingly modeling for “instructional leadership competencies” but they are taking a hands-on approach to student achievement (Harris, et al., 2004, p. 20).
This means that principals and students are coming in contact much more often than in the past. Thus principals not only mentor teachers who in turn mentor students, but principals often skip the middle man, as it were, and take part in mentoring students directly (Tillman, 2003). Many principals, as part of their daily practice of leadership, report engaging in close, hands-on monitoring of all aspects of school life. Many principals now routinely walk around schools so that they can feel the “pulse of the school” (Lim, 2003). Monitoring what is happening in school is a major part of mentoring both teachers and students, insofar as it keeps the principal involved in the daily life of the school, and allows for many informal moments to reinforce modeling relationships.

One principal reports that through his twice daily “walkabouts” he learns much about the students in school, simply because he “mingles around with them…they tell me what is going on in the school” (Lim, p. 3). Principals are also getting closer to students through their involvement in educational leadership. By planning and monitoring curriculum, principals find themselves in classrooms often, sometimes getting direct feedback from students (Lord, 2005). When all of this is added together, one arrives at “communally bonded” schools like the Farragut Elementary school, an all-black school in St. Louis with a very high level of achievement (Morris, 2002). The school established a solid communal spirit by involving parents more in school life, by helping teachers cope, and by mentoring all students in culturally sensitive ways. Most importantly, strong relationships are created by principal, teachers and students.

In accordance with abovementioned theories about the strength of kinship in African American culture (Jones, 2002), the “teachers and staff members take on aspects of the role of parents with their African American students” (Morris, p. 3). Overall, research has found that, especially amongst African American students, “these kinds of communal arrangements build
trust and assure parents that school personnel genuinely have the students’ interests at heart” (Morris, p. 3). Indeed, in one case, one teacher made communalism more literal by becoming the godmother to some of the students in the school. In order to solidify the communal spirit, the school also linked up with the black church in the area, thus finding support from that bulwark presence in the African American community. The example of Farragut is held up as a model in the context of an educational system where “a great number of low-income African American students will continue to attend urban schools that are overwhelmingly African American” (Morris, p. 4). As a result, communal spirit is a way to “ensure equitable education for African American children” (Morris, p. 4).

Conclusion

This literature review has examined the issue of mentoring as it applies to both African American principals and, in turn, their mentoring of African American students (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002; Loder, 2005; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002; McCray et al., 2006; Scott, 2005; Walker, 2003). The various barriers facing African American principals are reviewed, as are the problems encountered by African American students in terms of graduation and success later in life. Mentoring, based on a strong theoretical basis with roots in Attachment Theory and Sociomotivational Theory, is proposed as a means by which start-up principals can be prepared to take on the challenges of the principalship today (Avalon, 2007; Heung-Ling, 2003; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Lee, et al., 2006; Ramani, et al., 2006; Williams, et al., 2004). Mentoring for African American principals is especially important, in light of the fact that so few African Americans are able to rise to the position of principal.

In reviewing the characteristics of mentoring for both African American principals and students, a mutual cultural factor was detected (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Hall, 2008;
Harris, et al., 2004; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Holloway, 2004; Jones, 2002; Littky & Schen, 2003; Lim, 2003; Mullen, 2006; O’Mahoney, 2003; Tillman, 2003). Mentoring for African Americans must focus on the whole person, both his or her social as well as academic factors. Mentoring must be primarily relational for African Americans, as building strong relationships has been found to be the primary means by which African Americans stay on the job and in school.

In the particular case of African American principals as mentors to students, this development has occurred partly from expediency in inner-city schools, and partly from theoretical momentum which has pushed mentoring from academic to whole-person concerns. African American principals, it was found, establish a strong bond with, and even champion the achievement and success of African American students, possibly based on African cultural values with regard to leadership, kinship and community (Avalon, 2007; Crutcher, 2007; Britner, et al., 2006; Dawes & Dawes, 2005; Eanes & Mansaray, 2007; Gehrke & Jenkins, et al., 2006; Glomb, et al., 2006; George & Aronson, 2003; Hall, 2007; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).

Thus, not only does the relationship become the key factor of any African American-related mentoring, but in many cases African American mentors find themselves either mothering or fathering, or acting as father figures, for African American youth. In the context of the effective schools movement, learner-centered schools which use community-building and school climate control as the best way to improve student outcomes and later success in life model mentoring in all African American contexts. Through these various channels, principals have become much more hands-on in their leadership-directed management of schools. As a result of this, it is less uncommon to find principals getting actively involved, along with teachers, in mentoring students directly. While principals engage in any number of recent innovations in management, such as the walkabout, they come into contact with students much
more often, and have many more opportunities to act as a role model for and, in fact, mentor students. This study closes with case studies of African American principals or principals of color who have become involved directly in mentoring African American students. The positive results of such involvement are noted.

These studies again demonstrate that African American principals do engage African American students according to culturally relevant kinship and family-based beliefs, in effect often acting as a surrogate father or mother for African American students (Avalon, 2007; Harris, et al., 2004; Jones, 2002; Li & Lal, 2006; Lim, 2003; Lord, 2005; Morris, 2002; Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). A specific case study, while detailing the case of a principal of color mentoring African American students, demonstrates vividly the long-term impact that positive principal-student mentoring can have on African American students. Also, this case study makes clear that in many ways principals mentoring students successfully are simply passing along mentoring that they in turn received both in their youth and as young professionals, from other principals. Thus, this literature finds that there is a cycle of mentoring by which African American principals who are well-mentored can mature to become better mentors to African American students, who will then benefit both academically and in lifelong success as a result of the mentoring relationship.
The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of African American male high school principal mentors on the social behavior, and self-esteem of African American male at-risk high school students. This chapter describes the research design, participants, data sources, and data analysis process. The study utilized a qualitative research design called portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture is a method of inquiry that shares some of the features of other qualitative research methods, such as ethnography, case study, narrative, subtlety of human experience and organizational life methods (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Rather than seeking to develop a complete picture of the background of the interviewee’s views, as is done in the life history approach, portraiture seeks to bring out the voice of the interviewee by focusing on context, relationship, emergent themes and the aesthetic whole in the responses. Portraiture is appropriate for this study because, much like family storytelling, portraiture indicates the relationships between and among the individual’s various stories and seeks to develop a full sense of their views. The final portraits provide an easy topic of conversation as well, allowing potential readers or viewers of the portrait to learn more about and perhaps even participate in the tradition created by the stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Portraiture

This study utilized the portraiture framework as devised by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Portraiture is a creative qualitative approach to engaging in research of leaders and groups in action and in telling the stories of individuals in life (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997). As the portraitist works the verbal canvas, he creates a narrative that is at once complex,
provocative, and inviting, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history (1997, p.11).

Life history is influenced by a variety of factors, including specific events, noted experiences, and the passage of other persons through an individual’s life over time (Knowles, 1992). These life experiences affect what people believe in, and, consequently, how they learn (Clark, 1992). As a result, a life history approach to this study might enable the researcher to better understand how the interviewee’s life and work influence his or her views. Even though this research design is useful, and highly valued as a means of eliciting the full context behind an interviewee’s remarks, I determined that, for the purposes of this study, the “complete picture” was not needed, and a slice of life or more focused approach was more useful. For this reason, I choose portraiture as opposed to a life history approach to the interviews. A portraiture approach can still capture the full complexity of the dynamics of a mentoring relationship by focusing on the following aspects of social and cultural context shaping the dialogue between portraitist and participant: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997).

Context represents a description of the setting where the action of mentoring takes place, and as such is believed to broaden one’s understanding of the mentoring process. In terms of this study, the context is that four African American male at-risk students, of low socioeconomic status, are being mentored by two African American male principals in an urban, Midwestern city. Context also involves establishing whether or not the interviews will take place in situations where the participants felt comfortable, allowing them maximum openness in their responses. It is understood that contexts are in constant flux, meaning that participants can shape and change context by their words, and that the stories participants tell also shape context.
Voice is incorporated into the study through the interaction of the voices of the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer expresses his voice by establishing a frame for discussion, focusing on important topics and themes. At the same time, the interviewee tells his story, and articulates his vision of how mentoring works in the context of his experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The interaction of these voices blends them into a harmonious description of the mentoring experience. Also, the voices of the mentors and mentees must be blended together in order to create a common voice loud enough to inspire African American males to pull together in cooperative action.

The relationship element of portraiture involves building a healthy relationship between the researcher and participants, and between mentors and mentees. The researcher works to establish a feeling of rapport and trust between the participants, developing with them an alliance by which all involved feel they are working together in an understanding and caring way, to better understand the world that mentors and mentees work and study in. This means that a judgmental approach to portrait development, seeking some objective outcome according to which some will be judged superior or inferior to others, must be eschewed in favor of a more cooperative approach.

Emergent themes mean that the researcher allows themes to emerge naturally from the process of interviewing. The researcher comes to the interview with preconceptions drawn from the literature, general knowledge of the field, and prior experience in similar settings. But the goal of portraiture, with its reliance on emergent themes, is to see what resonates in the culture, development, and educational backgrounds of the interviewees, to lead to other questions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By focusing on the emergent themes of the interview the researcher gains a better understanding of the most important issues that the mentors or mentees
are speaking about, from their point of view, and thus helps the researcher better incorporate those themes into the painting of the overall portrait of their experiences.

Finally, aesthetic whole involves finding linkages and connections among all of the different issues and points raised by the mentors and mentees in their interviews. For example, even though themes are raised separately, often focusing on an issue in a non-overlapping way, in reality all themes overlap and one ends up studying the interactions among themes. The goal of portraiture is to hear the voice of the person being interviewed, and to let the interviewee fill the frame with views and attitudes expressive of their, not the interviewer’s, life. Attention will be paid to the details of the participant’s stories, what they say, how they say it, and the meaning of their words in the context of a holistic portrait. As a result, threads of themes and other patterns running through all responses will gradually build up an aesthetic whole which conveys the full reality of the respondents. In fact, the result of the interviews is an informal photo essay (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

For all of these reasons, I believe that the portraiture approach to interviewing and interpreting of the responses is most appropriate for a study of the views of African American males in high school education. I will meet with each participant on an individual basis and use a series of guiding questions to help the interviewee paint his portrait.

Participants

The participants in this study consist of two African American male high school principals and four African American male at-risk high school students, all of whom will be interviewed using the portraiture framework (see data sources section for explanation). I selected two African American high school principals because the schools they serve are the only high schools in Detroit, Michigan, that provide a mentoring program. Two of the African American
male high school students were selected because they were defined as at-risk. Principals determined which students were at-risk by recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors. All participating students were selected based on their completion of a full year of mentoring by their high school principals before the start of the study. The four students in this study knew their mentors prior to the start of the program. Bryan knew his mentor for four months prior to the program, James for three months, Robby for eight months and Jorge for two months. The principals had no formal training prior to their participation in this mentoring program which lasted for one year.

Data Sources

After scheduling interviews I will use three different methods for collecting data: participant observations, interview protocols using open-ended line of questioning, and focus groups. Those students and principals that chose to participate in two-hour interview were be able to choose the environment within the school. Our initial meeting was be a time to become acquainted with one another, set boundaries, establish dates for interview sessions, and a way for me to gain a sense of the trust and understanding of the participants. I developed additional questions and interview the student and principals a second time to follow up on the issues raised, after all participants have participated in two interviews. I brought the participants together for a focus group, which lasted one hour, to discuss and recap our interviews. Questions asked during the interview focused on the nature of the mentoring relationship, and include such concerns as how the mentoring relationship was originally established, whether or not the participant believes that the mentoring has been successful, whether or not they have gained any wisdom from mentoring, and what they learned about being either a mentor or a mentee.

The first meeting served two purposes; first, the interviews were a means for learning and
assembling the narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer understanding of mentoring. This also involved informed consent forms a projected timeline for interview sessions, and a deadline for the final focus group. The questions also aimed to answer the fundamental research questions of the study, and seek to determine mentor and mentee views on whether or not the mentoring experience improved the mentee’s social behavior, academic behavior, or personal self-esteem. Finally, questions were asked about what the mentors or mentees learned from the mentoring experience as a whole, and to what extent they feel their knowledge can help others develop as mentors. A focus group of all the participants was formed to discuss similarities and likeness.

Developing the Portraits

The interviews were conducted at the participants’ schools. The participants were four African American male high school students and two African American male Principals who were recruited by email. The principals had no formal training prior to participation in the mentoring program. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed using audio and field notes, the data obtained in the interviews will be coded by color, alerting the researcher to certain recurrent topics, thoughts and concerns expressed by the participants, similarities between the responses, provisional categories for themes and concerns were established, the relationships between the categories were explored, and the themes and categories were subsequently refined.

Assumptions and Limitations

A limitation of this study is that, for various reasons, principals or students interviewed may not be forthright about the progress they are making as mentors or mentees. The principals and students may also choose not to complete the interview. What answers are provided, however, are assumed to be an accurate reflection of the viewpoints of principals or students
involved. Finally, only a limited number of African American males were available to serve as mentors to African American students, and this fact, as well as the scarcity of organizational resources necessary to carry out a successful mentoring program, may compromise the ultimate transferability of their views and experiences with the mentoring process.

Summary

This study examined the mentoring relationship between African American male high school principals in Detroit, Michigan, and African American male at-risk high school students. The participants were interviewed to determine to what extent they felt that participation in the mentoring program improved their social behavior, academic behavior, and personal self-esteem. This study was undertaken to determine if same-race mentoring does indeed abide by best practice of mentoring as outlined in the literature, in so far as it is believed to more quickly establish an emotional bond and a supportive culture of caring between mentor and mentee.
CHAPTER 4. THE PORTRAITS

Introduction to the Results

Despite a willingness to incorporate mentoring into school programs and create new programs where the primary focus is on mentoring, it remains difficult to determine what the specific benefits of mentoring actually are (Hall, 2008). Several reasons have been offered for this lack of empirical evidence. When examining the research of experts on mentoring, one is often confronted by explanations that empirical evaluation is difficult, expensive, and not often a priority for high schools (Neely, 2003). Researchers are not always culpable since widely agreed-upon means of data collection and methodological designs for evaluation are lacking as well (Hobson & Sharp, 2005).

Little research has been done that utilizes portraiture as a methodology in assessing the efficacy of mentoring programs. The quantitative studies that have been conducted, emphasizing the relationship between at-risk youth and a caring adult, point to improved mentee outcomes, but their recommendations have often been disputed or ignored. Among these quantitative studies that postulate mentoring as an effective means for at-risk youth to better navigate life’s challenges, those that indicate positive outcomes most often occur when a strong relationship exists between a mentor and his or her mentee (Harris et al., 2004). “At-risk” is defined for the purposes of the present study as a student whose dysfunctional family and social life have impacted his academic performance so seriously that his commitment to continuing education is in jeopardy.

Portraiture is the methodology selected that most accurately reflects the true nature of the topic of this study. It is a fresh approach that facilitates a deeper understanding of the meaning and nature of mentorship and, for the purposes of this study, focuses on the relationships...
between six African American males in Detroit schools: two at-risk students, two students who are not considered at-risk, and two African American male principals who serve as their mentors. Principals determined which students were at-risk by recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors (Robby and Jorgé) and which were not (Bryan and James), for the purposes of this study. Portraiture encourages authentic engagement with the study’s participants as co-creators of knowledge. Portraiture also gives voice to the interviewee in the telling of his story. By doing so, it is possible to examine whether or not the African American participants believe mentoring to be an effective educational tool and whether or not the principals in particular live up to their responsibilities and expectations of aiding their students, especially those who are at-risk. Observing any similarities or contrasts between at-risk and not at-risk students should provide useful information for this study.

In this chapter, an understanding is provided of how a Mentoring Brother 2 Brother (MB2B) program was utilized in Detroit, including four students and their two mentors (principals). Currently, only two states, Michigan and Texas, utilize the MB2B program (MB2B, 1999). An MB2B program is specifically designed for use by principals and high school students with the mission and vision of supporting the social, emotional, and cultural well being of youth who are often targets of peer pressure that may encourage them to engage in risky behavior that is often life-threatening. All MB2B programs (mentoring, tutoring, community service, leadership, and spirituality) are designed to be strong in discipline, prevention, and intervention components in partnership with the parent(s) and school principals to provide youth development programming to empower young men to achieve new levels of accountability and responsibility. Teachers recommend students to participate in the program, based on their knowledge of each student. The program has no specified length, but is able to continue as long as the student and
mentor both agree to the process.

In particular, the study’s participants talked about mentoring, the efficacy mentoring has had on their lives, and whether or not mentoring strengthened the interactions between students, teachers, fellow students, families, and even the African-American community at large. These portraits of the relationships between these African American mentors and their mentees, in turn, help validate the mentoring program as an essential tool in meeting the needs of African American high school students at risk.

The literature review enlarged overall awareness of what might be discovered during the interviews with the four students participating in the study, but there was still a need to avoid transposing those ideas upon the students or principals over the course of the interviews. Rather, the goal was that each student and mentor, in his own distinct and unique voice, might point to common themes that stand on their own first, before later being incorporated into a theoretical overview that includes or amplifies the ideas of earlier researchers. For example, if the childhood experiences of the at-risk African-American students were marked by disruption or unpredictability, then the interviews with the two at-risk African American student may reveal that, the relationships they forged with their mentors, based on a sense of trust, significantly compensates for their early handicaps.

Parental rejection theory links a young person’s self-esteem with hardship or negative behavior patterns that he or she experiences in their home life (Britner et al., 2006). When parents reject their at-risk children, these school-age individuals often find themselves in dire need of guidance from a responsible mentor. In this study, it was expected that the two at-risk students might highlight what mentoring meant to them and show how they’ve been able to avoid potentially negative educational outcomes by seeking guidance and counsel from an
empathetic mentor to surmount their unique challenges.

By way of establishing the visual setting of the interviews, all four students wore the basic ‘uniform’ that is required by the rules and regulations of their schools. The uniform consists of a white shirt (not a tee shirt) and either blue or black pants. Three of the students wore white dress shirts and one wore a white golf-type shirt. The rules require that pants cannot be baggy or have a waistline that sags below the waist (since that particular style is considered to be identified with gang members or otherwise projects a negative image). All four students wore pants that were acceptable.

The appearance of the classrooms in which the interviews took place – as well as the entire school – was typical of an inner-city school district. Unlike wealthier districts, or schools in suburban neighborhoods, it was clear that there are many areas in need of repair in the school. For example, the classroom where the interviews took place was in obvious need of new paint, as many places on the walls were discolored or even had some areas of pealing paint. A number of ceiling tiles were missing as well, and there was at least one light burned out, making the rooms appear darker than they should have been. In addition, not all of the chairs in the rooms were matching.

Portrait 1 – Bryan

In the first interview with Bryan – a soft-spoken boy whose eyes often filled with sudden mirth when recounting a particularly happy experience he shared with his mentor, Principal Rollings – the aim was to understand the basis of the relationship. In other words, given all the experiences of Bryan’s young life, what made those he had with Principal Rollings unique? The interview proceeded as follows:
LD: Would you say your principal is a good mentor?

Bryan: Yeah.

LD: Why? In what way?

Bryan: Because he’s smart. He’s nice and he cares about us.

LD: How is he different as a mentor than as a principal?

Bryan: In the program, I call him Chris. But at school when he’s the principal, I call him Principal Rollings. He’s still the same nice guy though. He might be more serious as a principal. But I think he has to be so that people don’t misbehave.

LD: How is he similar as a mentor and principal?

Bryan: Just that. He’s still nice. He still cares a lot.

LD: What types of mentoring are being offered? Do you meet in a group? Or one-on-one?

Bryan: We meet in a group and one-on-one. We all get time alone with him. But we’re more often in a group.

LD: What kinds of things do you talk about?

Bryan: Everything. I talk about music with him. We talk about school and homework. We talk about our families and friends.

LD: Do you ever go to him with a problem?

Bryan: Yeah. I told him about my mom. That she’s sad. He listens.

Bryan’s mother’s sadness is due to her own mother’s death, that is, Bryan’s grandmother. What is striking is the level of trust Bryan displays toward his mentor. Principal Rollings is able to provide a palpable sense of comfort and safety in their relationship and by doing so, Bryan feels secure in revealing the intimate details of his home life.
Although Bryan didn’t speak of rejection, his father has been entirely absent from his life. This information sheds light on Bryan’s experience with male consistency in his life, and may contribute to his appreciation for his mentor. During some parts of the interview, Bryan’s expression changed dramatically, indicating that he was emotionally affected by many of our conversations. Like many young men, the absence of a father appeared to weigh heavily on Bryan, and that likely had a great deal to do with the ease with which he accepted Principal Rollings as a mentor. The weight of understanding the reality of his situation was, at times, very visible on his face, and the emotional challenges of being raised by a single mother were felt in other ways as well, as revealed in the following interchange:

LD: How has your day been going so far?
Bryan: All right.
LD: Is everything going okay at home?
Bryan: Not really.
LD: Is it anything that you feel comfortable talking about?
Bryan: I don’t know. I guess…
LD: You guess you do feel comfortable talking about it?
Bryan: My mom’s been very sad lately. She’s been crying a lot.
LD: Do you know why she’s sad? What happened?
Bryan: I think it’s cuz her mom died.
LD: That’s your grandma.
Bryan: Yeah. She had cancer.
LD: How old was she?
Bryan. Fifty, I think. I don’t know. Fifty maybe.
Bryan’s ability to trust his mentor, Principal Rollings, and confide in him the pain he experiences at home, appears to be a critical element in his new personal and educational maturity. He allows himself to express his vulnerability to his mentor – as well as to the interviewer – and his belief in Principal Rollings’ counsel goes a long way in accounting for his clear recognition and calm acceptance of the challenges in store for him. The student’s demeanor suggests that he will be able to surmount the obstacles life’s thrown his way.

In the following section of the interview, Bryan reflects on how he has changed since Principal Rollings entered his life, based on his positive experiences:

LD: So, tell me a little bit more about your academics before you entered this program. You said you really didn’t care that much about homework and stuff. You made up excuses for why you didn’t do the work. Why didn’t you do the work?

Bryan: I don’t know. It was hard, I guess. And I got bored. When I didn’t understand something, I didn’t really want to ask the teacher about it. I felt stupid to raise my hand in class. I thought kids would laugh. I felt like everyone understood stuff but me.

LD: Now do you ask questions?

Bryan: Yeah. I always ask questions.

LD: And how do you feel doing it?

Bryan: Good. I don’t feel bad anymore. I feel happy to be learning something. Except math. I don’t like math.

LD: So now you feel like you care more about learning?

Bryan: Yeah, I want to make something of my life. And I like learning new things.

LD: Do you have a favorite subject?

Bryan: English, probably. I like reading and writing.
LD: How has your relationship with the principal changed since you have been in this program?
Bryan: It’s changed a lot. I used to avoid the principal. I think everybody does – or did. But I feel that the principal is someone I can trust now. I think he’s nice. And I do think he cares about us. I don’t think he just wants to catch you doing something wrong.
LD: What personal growth have you experienced in the program?
Bryan: Like what?
LD: Like how do you think you’ve changed – personally, inside – for the better?
Bryan: I like myself more. I didn’t really like myself much before this program.
LD: And what about outside the program?
Bryan: I just care more about life.

Because the African American principals participating in this study had developed, or intended to develop, close emotional ties with the students they mentored, it was obviously important they explored the common experiential truths that already existed between them. In the interviews where African American mentors and students, linked by racial and cultural backgrounds, talked about how easy it was to communicate and understand one another, I wondered if the sharing of a common heritage explained the easy rapport between them. The interview with Bryan reveals how his mentor’s ability to step across traditional principal-student boundaries comes into play:

Bryan: My mentor is Principal Rollings, but I call him Chris. He likes that better. He’s a nice guy and he’s really funny. He makes me laugh.
LD: Is he someone that you look up to?
Bryan: Yeah.
LD: In what ways?

Bryan: He’s funny. People like him and listen to him when he talks. He’s smart too, and he knows a lot about a lot of stuff. Like music and stuff. He likes music a lot. Especially jazz.

LD: Do you like jazz?

Bryan: Um, not really. But I think it’s okay. He says it’s something you get an ear for after a while.

When the two mentors – Principal Gregson and Principal Rollings – were paired with the four students, you hear what a change the presence of the two principals made in the boys’ difficult lives. No longer drawn into a downward spiral of lower and lower self-esteem, both James and Bryan expressed how they started to genuinely care about themselves and the opportunities with which they are presented at school. The attention and time devoted to the students by their mentors went a long way for the confidence and self-esteem of the students. Bryan’s assessment of that change in attitude was expressed in the following exchange:

LD: I want to ask you specifically what this mentoring program has taught you.

Bryan: Um. I guess I feel like I care about stuff more.

LD: Like what?

Bryan: Like homework and stuff. I used to not really care if I finished my assignments or not. I would just make stuff up, excuses why I didn’t finish it. I got really bad grades and my mom would get really mad about it. She would say that I wouldn’t ever get a good job if I didn’t do well in school.

LD: Do you know what you want to do after you graduate?

Bryan: I like music. I want to produce music.
Instead of divorcing himself from educational goals, Bryan now happily envisions attending college. This constitutes a concrete and meaningful validation of his African American high school principal’s ability to forge an emotional bond with his mentee, instill confidence in the student, and inspire hope in the educational promises of the future. Principal Rollings verified this bond during his comments. Bryan’s delight in Principal Rollings’ individualized attention was expressed clearly, and the student’s outlook and sense of his own future prospects have significantly brightened.

Portrait 2 – James

James, another student participating in the study, showed an ability to voice personal concerns in his interactions with his own mentor, Principal Rollings. James began the interview appearing visibly nervous, but as he talked about his mentor, he grew calmer, and his appreciation for the principal’s presence in his life was unmistakable. It was clear from James’ demeanor and facial expressions that he wanted to participate and actually enjoyed speaking about his mentor and their relationship. This sense of trust in the older man’s guidance is reflected in the African American teenager’s own words:

LD: Is the principal a good mentor?

James: He’s awesome. He’s really nice and fun and I feel like I could trust him with anything. I’m not afraid to tell him anything. He always says that he has been there before and he understands. It’s nice to have somebody who won’t judge you and he always says that. He’ll never judge me.

LD: That’s really a great person to have in your life. A true friend.

James: Yeah.
James also explained how trust in his mentor, Principal Rollings, has changed his young life. He details how his mentor has been instrumental in shaping both his notions about himself and the future. He has learned to take both seriously, as noted from these comments:

LD: What has this mentoring program taught you?
James: Um, it’s taught me to be more serious.
LD: In what ways?
James: I am always the clown. I like to make people laugh, but I was getting into a lot of trouble in class because of it. Teachers yelled a lot.
LD: How has this program made you more serious?
James: Well, I’m still me. I still like to make people laugh, but I guess I realized that there is a time and a place for it. Not in class. I’m serious now in class. I listen and pay attention to the teachers. If someone tries to get my attention or is goofing around, I ignore it.
LD: What types of relationships have been built from this mentoring program?
James: Well, the relationship with my mentor – Principal Rollings– is the biggest, I guess. And I’ve met new people in the program too.

James articulates not only how his mentor, Principal Rollings, has altered his attitude about himself and his new-found academic abilities, but how this new self-confidence has affected his family perceptions of him as well:

LD: How has mentoring affected your academics? You already said that before you were the class clown and you’re more serious now. But how were your grades before the program?
James: Not good. Pretty bad actually.
LD: And what about now?

James: My grades are a lot better. I have to work hard for it though. Sometimes I think that all those years that I was goofing around, I missed a lot. Now I sometimes feel like I have to play catch up.

LD: How has your relationship with the principal changed since you have been in this program?

James: It’s changed a lot because before I didn’t really know him at all. I guess I wanted to not be noticed by him.

LD: I’ve heard that a lot. Do you think that principals often intimidate kids? Do you think the kids see them as someone who is not very nice? Or strict?

James: I think so. All my principals in the past I have felt like that. It seemed like the only time you saw the principal was when he was punishing someone or something.

Principal Rollings not like that though. He’s a cool guy.

LD: So, the relationship has definitely changed.

James: Yeah, I was afraid of knowing him before. I didn’t know that he’d want to know me either.

LD: What personal growth have you experienced in the program?

James: Personally? I do better in school. My grades are good. I want to go to college. I never wanted to go to college before. Now I do and I think I can get in.

LD: What about outside the program? Has the program affected other areas of your life?

James: Um, I think I get along better with my sisters now. They don’t bother me as much as they used to.

LD: Why do you think that is?
James: I think I’ve matured.

LD: Are they younger?

James: Yeah. And they used to annoy me all the time.

Nowhere in the interview with James did he ever mention color.

Portrait 3 – Robby

Robby, a third mentee in the study, has a caramel complexion, smiles easily, and sits upright in his chair. Despite his friendly appearance, Robby was not excited about being part of the interview process. It was extremely difficult to draw him out and obtain detailed information about the mentoring program and, occasionally, efforts to press for more details resulted in Robby becoming irritable. As a result of his hesitancy in being part of the process, there was far less valuable information collected from Robby than the previous two student mentees. Initially, when speaking about his mentor, Principal Gregson, Robby’s demeanor turns calm and serious:

LD: How has your relationship with the principal changed since you have been in this program?

Robby: We are better friends. I do not really think of him as the principal. I mean, I do and I don’t. He is the principal and I still respect that, but I also think of him more like a personal friend of mine. He’s sort of a father figure to me.

An interchange with Robby highlights the close similarity that he felt with the members of the program. However, the absence of any specific reference to skin color or race as a defining characteristic in describing his program peers or his valued mentor is notably conspicuous, just as it was in the preceding interviews with Bryan and James.
Robby: I like the people in the program. I feel like they are a lot like me. At first I didn’t know if I’d like the program or them. I thought maybe they’d be boring or something. But we all like each other and I guess we have more in common than I expected.

LD: So would you recommend this program to other people?

Robby: Yeah.

LD: Why? What would you tell them?

Robby: I’d tell them that it will change who you are in a good way. That if you want to do better in school and start to care about your life, then you should do it. I would tell them that if people make fun of it, that’s their problem.

LD: Is your principal a good mentor?

Robby: Yes.

LD: How?

Robby: He’s just a great person. He’s successful and smart. He’s still kind of young and that makes him cool too.

In all of my interviews with the African American students, a sense of trust looms large in the relationship between mentor and mentee. All four students, both those at-risk and those not at-risk, saw their mentors as reliable individuals. The two groups of mentees appeared equally likely to trust their mentors, and regard them as people who could be relied on. With Robby and Jorgé, the two at-risk African American students, trust in their mentors’ friendship may be interpreted to have a more pronounced effect, due both to the novelty of the relationship, as well as their dysfunctional home life. However, all four students were positively affected by their mentors and this shared characteristic also appears inextricably linked with the students’ own enhanced view of themselves. That is, the ability to forge a trust-evoking relationship with their
mentor brought about positive change in each student, not just in terms of their own self-confidence, but also in their ability to tackle and to cope with educational and social challenges. Robby also commented on how he found commonalities in other participants. For Robby, it was important to be able to identify these similarities amongst peers to avoid feeling like the other and developing a low self-esteem.

Portrait 4 – Jorgé

Last, Jorgé participated in the interview process. Unfortunately, Jorgé, like the previous student interviewee, was not overly interested in participating in this study and was very reluctant to engage in conversation. As a result, the information obtained from both of these interviews was rather limited. Jorgé is a charismatic boy with a tattoo peeking out of his v-neck collared shirt with the school’s emblem on the right side, belying his gentle presence. A girl waves at him happily from outside the classroom door, but Jorgé’s serious mood is unaffected by her presence. In fact, Jorgé’s demeanor could be described as one of irritation, as if he did not really want to be there and that influenced his overall responses. The interview included the following exchange:

LD: What types of relationships have you built thanks to this program?
Jorgé: The relationship with my mentor.
LD: What is his name?
Jorgé: Principal Gregson. But he lets me call him by his first name - Dan.
LD: You said that you have more friends now. Are your friends in the program too?
Jorgé: A couple of them, but I just meant that overall I am more confident so I have more friends in, like, regular school now.
LD: Okay. What personal growth have you experienced in the program?
Jorgé: I am more confident and that makes me happier. I didn’t like being so shy but I didn’t feel confident about myself. I didn’t have much self-esteem. Now I do. I mean, at least I have more. I’m not over the top confident now, but I’m better.

The same increased sense of self-esteem, and its effect on assuming new social and educational responsibilities, is instantly recognizable in this conversation with Jorgé, who is an at-risk student. His backpack bulges with library books, and he happily listed the differences Principal Gregson and the mentorship program has made in his life:

LD: What has this mentoring program taught you?

Jorgé: The mentoring program has taught me to be a better person.

LD: In what way?

Jorgé: I guess that before the program I didn’t have many friends.

LD: And now?

Jorgé: I have a lot more. I think because I always used to be very shy. I think the program has helped me open up and be more confident about myself.

LD: How were your academics before the program?

Jorgé: Pretty okay. I was always a pretty decent student. I’ve always had to study though.

LD: And how are your academics now?


LD: What about outside the program? Has there been growth there?

Jorgé: Outside the program? I think my parents are happier that I’m in it. I think they worried about me because I spent a lot of time by myself – alone.
The Principals

The African American mentors in this study expressed how their responsibilities might include everything from being a surrogate parent to a trusted counselor and a wise friend. Moreover, it is clear from the interviews with the mentees that they recognized the extra effort that their mentors made to improve their situations, and this experience made a strong impression on them. For the two African American principals participating in the study, improving the academic standing of their student mentees emerged as the overriding aim in their roles as mentors. Both Principal Rollings and Principal Gregson hoped to aid their mentees, both at-risk students and those not at-risk, by emphasizing the importance of education. The two mentors saw school as a place that allowed young people to transform themselves and create a newfound sense of self-respect. The two principals expressed their feelings this way:

LD: I’m interested in your impressions of how the mentoring that was just described has impacted your students’ learning. Overall, how have students been impacted by the use of a mentoring program in your school?
Principal Gregson: Shall I go first?
LD: Sure.
Principal Gregson: I think that the program has showed them that we “authority figures” at school are there to help them. I think oftentimes kids see principals and teachers, as mentioned, as the bad guys. The truth is, we want them to do well in school. We want to nurture their educational experience. We don’t want to get them in trouble and fail them. I think that the mentoring program has helped them see that to be the truth as opposed to what I just described. Of course the program also teaches and preaches about good study
habits and good grades. We give them help with specific things they need and stress the importance of doing well in school. We want to prepare them for the future.

LD: Principal Rollings?

Principal Rollings: Well, I will totally second all that was just said. I do think that the students begin to see us in a different light – and I think that is very positive. I don’t think they see us anymore as this person that they are up against. I think it’s very enlightening when they begin to see us as friends. There’s something in them that seems to light up. A guard is dropped.

These two principals perceived mentorship as a novel form of instructional leadership. Their mentees continued to be held responsible for their academic and overall well-being. The two principals wanted to ensure that their students stayed actively involved in schoolwork, and as mentors, their focus remained on the quality of their mentees’ academic achievements. In conversation, moreover, the two principals remained highly conscious of the boundaries of their educational roles, and maintained them throughout their professional mentor-mentee relationship. Although each principal mentioned possessing a vague awareness of what goes on in the lives of their mentees outside the classroom, these instances were few and far between:

LD: How do you evaluate your students in terms of their being well rounded and personal growth?

Principal Gregson: I look at all sorts of different factors. I look at how their attitude has changed, their self-esteem. I look at their grades and involvement in school – classroom and extra-curricular activities. I look at how they speak about their family.

Principal Rollings: We look at all of those factors as well. I think probably the most important is what Principal Gregson also said first and that is how the student’s overall
attitude about himself or herself has changed. That’s really the main point of this mentoring program. We want them to start seeing themselves and their lives in a new, more positive light. When the attitude changes, when there is hope and positivity, that’s when everything else in their life begins to change. It evolves into a well-rounded life. They become well-rounded individuals.

What stood out from these interviews was how the two principals expressed less concern about moving back and forth between worlds of color, as they did moving back and forth between roles of authority. In other words, they appeared more focused on their lives as educational administrators than on the fuller ethno-humanist role that mentorship often involves and to which the African American students in this study clearly responded. That is not to say that their interviews did not represent the ethno-humanist role of mentorship, but that it was always accompanied by a strong focus on the practical necessities for doing well academically.

This may be explained by the two African American principals’ relative youth, both having grown up after the civil rights movement, when the ethos of most black leaders was a commitment to “uplift.” Being born in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, when integration and opportunity were often taken for granted, the decades of experience as both African American students and educators held by the two principals might also explain why there is no explicit mention of race in their interviews. That does not minimize the genuine concern they feel towards the students they mentor, nor does it diminish their capacity to help their students garner the necessary educational skills to graduate from high school and enter the college ranks. But the language the two principals employ seems to obviate race as an overriding or primary concern in their responsibilities as mentor.
Principal Rollings: There isn’t really a “typical” session. They’re all different. But, we always first talk about what’s going on in the student’s life. Are there any problems we need to address or confront? I always want the student to be in a healthy place emotionally during our time together. That is sometimes hard to do if the student is thinking about a fight they had with their father or if they are worried about what someone said at school. Once these things are out in the open, we can have a good session, whether we are working on an essay together or shooting hoops. I try to be a good listener. I will offer my support and my advice on occasion. But I always want the student to deal with their feelings. I want them to be able to manage their feelings so that they learn how to do that and so that they can do it in the future. I don’t want them to suppress their feelings so it turns into something else – like anger or rage. Does that make sense?

The results of these verbal interviews and group discussions with the two African American principals indicate two things. First, Rollings and Gregson both demonstrated a narrow focus in their view of educational mentorship, when compared to the reflections of the four African American students. The principals’ vision of mentoring, especially in terms of being a “cultural broker,” may not be as all-inclusive as at-risk students in a blighted urban hub like Detroit might require. Second, although it is possible that young African American students may indeed be more responsive to the color-conscious mentorship styles of African American faculty members, the responses forwarded in the interviews of this study do not indicate whether same-race mentorship was necessarily a preference for either mentors or mentees. All four students and both of the principals recognized the significant gains made by the students since they had began participating in the mentoring program. The lack of discussion about skin color throughout
the interviews suggests that culture may be a more important factor than race in the context of mentoring.

Each of the African American students provided clear empirical and humanistic evidence that the guiding support of a wise and respected high school principal, acting in the role of mentor, deeply affected their mentees on a variety of levels. All the students acknowledged a deeper sense of self-confidence, an invigorated ability to tackle the academic tasks at hand, and a newfound resiliency and maturity in accepting responsibility across all fronts of their young lives. Their mentors became influential role models who actively enhanced their academic and social standing and helped them navigate problematic issues outside the schoolroom. As one principal noted in a focus group:

Principal Gregson: Academically, their grades have vastly improved and I’m not talking a little bit; I am talking about a drastic change in the right direction. Mentally that carries over. They feel better about themselves when they work hard, study, and get good grades. They are praised. We praise them. Their parents praise them. They feel good. Socially, they might change who they are hanging around with and they are pickier about whom they want in their lives. Their whole outlook begins to change. You see that in how they carry themselves. Their posture changes, literally. They stand taller and prouder. They have a newfound sense of self.

Interviews and discussions with the African American principals clarified another significant result. Despite the significant differences between the students and the mentors with regard to age, experience, and the types of problems they were experiencing, the principals found that a basic level of openness and honesty with the students promoted a great level of trust. That trust was necessary for the students to become motivated to change their behavior. The principals
recognized that once the mentees successfully changed their academic or social behavior with visible results, they were able to acknowledge those changes, which was the key to a change in students’ outlook and the beginning of a long road of positive transformation and growth. The enthusiasm with which the principals spoke about the changes they promoted, witnessed, and praised in their mentees was mirrored in the interviews with the students themselves, who recognized and articulated their personal changes as well.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

There has been a growing concern that too many African American students continue to underperform in high school. This has greatly jeopardized their chances of attending college (Crutcher, 2007; Neely, 2003). Many reasons have been cited to explain the underachievement of African American students. Some believe that it might be because of inherent racism in the schools (Jones, 2002). Some believe that schools view African American students with a negative attitude, which creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of poor student achievement over a period of time (Neely, 2003). In multiple previous studies, African American students had reported tacit discrimination in schools on a daily basis (e.g., Crutcher, 2007; Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). These findings suggested that the current educational system is not favorable for African American students. This has caused African American students to be placed into less challenging classes and has significantly impacted their educational life, including preventing many from acquiring college education (Neely, 2003).

Studies have shown that students’ standing in school could be improved by motivating students to develop relationships with at least one adult (Tillman, 2003; Ullmann, 2006; Wimberley, 2002). Mentors have been introduced in schools to build relationships with African American students and be role models for them (Wimberley, 2002). Mentoring might enhance their possibility to graduate from high school and be successful in entering into college or the workforce. Previous literature suggests that mentors play an essential role in helping African American students (Dawes & Dawes, 2005; Wimberley, 2002). However, identifying the right mentor for a particular student remains a question. Previous studies show that same race mentors offer friendship and guidance, and serve as role models for the students (Eanes & Mansarray,
2007; Glomb et al., 2006; Jekielek, 2002; Jones, 2002). In the case of the African American population, the literature is still complex and debatable. Some studies demonstrate a positive relationship (Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Wimberley, 2002) whereas others give mixed opinions (Townsell & Kritsonis, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). African American principals have a strong commitment to African American students and are more conscious of developing a direct mentor-like relationship with the students (Britner et al., 2006; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002).

Discussion of Findings

In order to acquire a complete understanding of the development of a strong relationship between same-race students and mentors, the study used a portraiture approach (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It involved interviewing six subjects, two male African American principals and four male African American students. It focused on context, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole in responses rather than exploring the whole background picture of the interviewees’ viewpoints. In this technique, the participants told a story and a portrait was built on the basis of their experience. Portraiture is a well-characterized method for doing qualitative research (McCray et al., 2006). Each of the six participants was interviewed and a portrait was built for them in order to describe the effects of the Mentoring Brother 2 Brother (MB2B) program in Detroit.

Four central research questions guided the present qualitative study. The following sections discuss the findings of the present study as delineated by the research questions, several major themes of trust, self-responsibility, race, and black history were found recurring throughout the interviews and are incorporated into the discussion of the research questions. The findings presented in the following sections are oriented around an understanding of those major
themes in the context of existing literature on the subjects of mentoring and leadership. The implications of the themes will be presented in a following section.

*How do the Relationships between African American High School Principals and African American High School Male Students Develop?*

One of the goals of this project was to foster mentoring between African American principals and students. According to the interviews from both students and principals, a trusting relationship of mentoring was established. The repeated interaction of meeting with the principals gave the students consistency with an individual they could learn to trust, which may have been relationship the students weren’t often exposed to. According to the interviews of the male students, they believed that their relationships with their principals had changed since the time their principals assumed the role of a mentor. The students stated that they were able to share every aspect of their lives with them as a result of the trust that was built. The students had gained trust in the mentors and were able to confide their feelings in them. The students discussed many aspects of their lives with the mentors, from academic life to personal life. They also discussed the problems they faced at home and the reasons that contributed to them being at-risk. The level of trust that the students gave their mentors was striking. Previous to the start of the program, the students avoided the principals, but later as trust was formed they were much more comfortable. The relationships between the students and principals changed significantly for the better. They realized that the principals cared about them. The mentors provided huge amounts of comfort and safety while talking to students, so the students felt secure sharing the finest details of their personal life. They were able to express their vulnerabilities to their mentors. Their clear recognition and calm acceptance of the challenges in store for them were
attributed to the counseling obtained from their mentors. This indicated that African American mentors developed a strong relationship with African American students.

Research by Kofi (1999), Jones (2002), and Hobson and Sharp (2005) suggested that relationships between students and mentors have primarily been responsible for the success of the student. However, studies have shown that relationships between principals and students can be slow to materialize (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Dunbar, 2002; Loder, 2005; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002; McCray et al., 2006; Scott, 2005; Walker, 2003). Studies indicate that principals get personally involved in mentoring at-risk students (Avalon, 2007; Harris & Ballenger et al., 2004; Jones, 2002; Li & Lal, 2006; Lim, 2003; Lord, 2005; Morris, 2002; Norfleet & Kritsonis, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, et al., 2006). Principals had come forward by themselves to set an example and to signal the importance of mentoring in schools (Avalon, 2007, p. 17). Furthermore, principals are increasingly taking interest in building relationships with students by making themselves aware about their achievements (Harris et al., 2004, pp. 20, 178). Holmes et al. (2007) suggested that African American students respond well to a color-conscious leadership style by an African American principal. Together, these studies suggest that the relationships between principals and students had changed from the past. The findings of the present study support others’ conclusions that the bond between principals and at-risk youth is growing as a result of mentoring initiatives (Harris et al., 2004). An interesting study by Dunbar and Villarruel (2002) suggested that the relationship between principals and students was usually disconnected. However, the findings of the present study indicated that African American mentors developed a strong relationship with African American students.
In What Ways does Mentoring by a Male African American High School Principal Influence the Social Behavior of a Male African American At-Risk High School Student?

The students admitted that their lives had changed after their mentors entered their lives. They explained that they started to develop a like for themselves, which was not the case before. The students learned to take life more seriously and agreed that their performance in class had improved as a result of the mentoring. One of the student participants, James, articulated this sentiment and stated, “I do better in school. My grades are good. I want to go to college. I never wanted to go to college before. Now I do and I think I can get in.” The students’ overall optimism and ambition for their lives improved. The students also indicated that they were getting better grades and that they did not feel bad about asking their teachers questions in class as they did before the counseling.

The mentors’ ability to understand the complex social obstacles confronted by students allowed the students to see themselves from a new viewpoint. Principal Rollings explained that building trust and a social connection (as opposed to a purely academic relationship) with the students through mentoring was critical to promote the emotional well-being of the student. Principal Rollings stated,

I always want the student to be in a healthy place emotionally during our time together. That is sometimes hard to do if the student is thinking about a fight they had with their father or if they are worried about what someone said at school. Once these things are out in the open, we can have a good session.

Students believed that their personal life had also improved as a result of participating in the mentoring program. The students pointed out that their mentors had altered their attitudes about themselves and helped them to identify new academic abilities in them. James pointed out that
his sisters used to annoy him a lot previously. However, James stated that since the mentors started guiding him, “I think I get along better with my sisters now. They don’t bother me as much as they used to.” The mentors had become influential role models who enhanced their academic and social standing in society.

The recurring theme of social trust throughout the student and principal interviews suggests that the African American mentors in the present study modulated the social behavior of African American students in a positive manner. The finding is in agreement with research conducted by Jones (2002), who posited that African American principals almost automatically became role models to African American students. Perhaps it is the “ethnic kinship” that they shared in common (Jones, 2002). According to Morris (2002), “These kinds of communal arrangements build trust and assure parents that school personnel genuinely have the students’ interests at heart” (p. 3). The findings of the present study support the conclusions of Jones and Morris. As a result of the Mentoring Brother 2 Brother program explored in the present study, African American mentors became father figures in the eyes of students (see also Jones, 2002).

In What Ways does Mentoring by a Male African American High School Principal Influence the Self-Esteem of a Male African American At-Risk High School Student?

The emotional bond that developed between the students and the mentors instilled confidence in the students, who noted that they could acknowledge a deeper sense of self-confidence after participating in the mentoring program. Self-esteem is a common goal of mentoring initiatives (Cole-Henderson, 2000), and studies have suggested that self-esteem is essential for social and academic success, particularly for at-risk youths (Avalon, 2007; Crutcher, 2007). The students in the present study explained that they used to feel bad about themselves periodically for a variety of reasons, including neglect in class or at home and negative social
confrontations with their peers and teachers. One of the student participants, Bryan, commented, “I don’t feel bad anymore. I feel happy to be learning something…. I want to make something of my life. And I like learning new things.” The students stated that the mentors taught them how to care about themselves. Several students stated that their low self-esteem prevented them from enjoying life, cherishing what they had, and working toward personal and academic goals. The environment of the group setting where students were able to relate and share with one another created a safe place for students where they befriended others who struggled just like them.

The principals also noted the enhancement of self-esteem in the students that they mentored. Principal Gregson stated, “They feel better about themselves when they work hard, study, and get good grades…. They stand taller and prouder. They have a newfound sense of self.” The students started to envision going to college, while before the mentoring program they used to avoid educational goals. The students learned to grab any opportunity presented to them at school and were motivated to pursue their extra-curricular interests, such as recreational and cultural activities. They were no longer drawn onto the downward spiral of lower self-esteem. Instead, they developed an invigorated ability to tackle the academic and social tasks and challenges at hand. The students developed a new self-understanding and deepened sense of self-responsibility. The findings of the present study across all six interviews indicate that African American principals as mentors positively influenced the self-esteem of African American students. However, because the principals and students did not discuss the topic of race at length, within the interviews there was an underlying tone that race does not have to said to be understood. Not all participants made explicit reference to the importance of cultural or racial similarities between the mentor and the student, and studies have suggested that the importance of same-race partnerships in mentoring initiatives may not be as significant as other factors, such
as the competence and level of training of the mentor (Townsell & Kritsonis, 2006; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Nonetheless, the findings of the present study suggest support for similar work by other researchers that showed that African American at-risk students can make great academic and social gains when mentored by African American principals (Harris et al., 2004; Jones, 2002; Morris, 2002).

What is the Impact of Mentoring on the Principal/Mentor?

Both of the principals believed that their mentoring helped the students prepare for the future. The students started to see the principals more as friends than superiors after the guard of “principal” was dropped. Both mentors perceived mentorship as a novel form of instructional leadership. This supports a great deal of literature that has suggested that African Americans in leadership positions that participate as mentors produce positive outcomes when paired with African American students (Avalon, 2007; Harris et al., 2004; Jones, 2002; Li & Lal, 2006; Lim, 2003; Lord, 2005; Morris, 2002). The issue for both principals was shedding their roles as “authority figures” to fulfill their duties in an informal way. The study revealed how the principals maintained the boundaries of their educational roles through their mentor-student relationship. The impact of mentoring on the principals was that they were more aware and focused on their role as educational administrators than on a humanist role generally held by mentors (Kofi, 1999). Moreover, both the principals had grown up after the civil rights movement when the motive and slogan of most African American leaders was a commitment to uplifting the race. This suggested that the data were not sufficient to understand fully the feelings of mentors towards their job. The participating principals’ responses suggested that their personal histories of growing up as African American men significantly affected their perceptions of their jobs as principals and their roles as mentors in complex and deep ways.
Further interviews and research would be necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the participants’ personal histories affected their perceptions of the mentoring relationship. Conclusively, mentors agreed that mentoring was a novel form of instruction and a great way to help students.

Previous studies indicated that principals were favorable as mentors because they provided emotional support and reassurance in addition to maintaining good relations with the students (Eanes & Mansaray, 2007). The principals of the present study clearly expressed their comprehension of the significance of their roles as mentors. Principal Rollings agreed with Principal Gregson when stating that the most important aspect of mentoring was “how the student’s overall attitude about himself or herself has changed.” Principal Rollings continued, “When the attitude changes, when there is hope and positivity, that’s when everything else in their life begins to change. It evolves into a well-rounded life. They become well-rounded individuals.” Interestingly, neither of the principals who participated in the study overtly mentioned or discussed the significance of race in the interviews, focusing instead on the distinctions of authority between students and principals. Perhaps the paradigm of race consciousness has changed substantially over the last 50 years with regard to the availability and role of African American leaders as mentors (Jerlando et al., 2007; Kofi, 1999).

According to existing research, most principals relied on a method to acquire knowledge from their jobs by ad hoc on-job training until recently, which contributed to the attrition of knowledge among principals (Holloway, 2004). Minority principals were often isolated because of their job and role as a principal and frequently had higher attrition rates (Littky & Schen, 2003). Therefore, all principals (especially minority principals) need mentoring to become better principals and to survive challenges (Littky & Schen, 2003). Seminars and internship
experiences greatly improved mentorship skills of all mentees and all principals (Holloway, 2004, p. 87). Trust was another variable that was also needed by the principals to function efficiently (Lim, 2003). Future studies dealing with the same research question could identify these issues.

Implications and Practical Applications

This study contributed to the understanding of interaction among African American mentors and students. The findings of the present study have significant implications that may be applicable to a wide American audience as well as to audience of other cultures. The implications include the positive consequences of principals as mentors for helping at-risk African American youth as well as the beneficial impact of same-race mentoring relationships. The most significant implication of the findings of this study is that students working with their principals as mentors on a formal and ongoing basis can show remarkable improvement, both academically and socially. All four of the students and the two principals agreed that the mentoring program had visible and positive impact on the lives of the students involved. This implies that although students may be reluctant to participate in such mentoring programs, they are likely to appreciate their value once they have joined and/or completed them.

However, the study was unable to yield sufficient evidence to determine the influence of the same-race component of the mentoring; it is possible that students who receive mentoring from principals would show similarly positive progress, regardless of the race of the student or mentor. On the other hand, the findings imply that race did not adversely affect the mentoring relationship. The fact that race was rarely mentioned by the participants may indicate a preexisting comfort level they have with one another – a comfort based in race and culture. In other words, race was not mentioned because it did not need to be. It was relevant
and understood from the beginning. This implies that same-race mentoring relationships may have a higher success rate for at-risk African American students than mentoring relationships that do not have the same-race component. Further research is necessary to determine the influence of a same-race component on mentoring relationships and whether that same-race component represents itself in distinct ways across cultures. It is possible that a same-race mentoring relationship may show equal or greater success among other cultures; for example, Hispanic students who are English language learners may benefit a great deal from being mentored by Hispanic principals. Future research should address this possibility with further qualitative study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of same-race mentoring as perceived by those involved. Future quantitative studies could use school records to evaluate the numerical effects of same-race mentoring programs on students’ academic success.

This study provided insight about how African American male principals could transform African American male students in a positive manner. Previous literature suggests that African American students can improve self-esteem and socially acceptable behavior through the mentoring efforts of African American principals (Avalon, 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006). This study contributed towards an enhanced understanding of the influence of mentors on the behavioral aspects of male African American students. The results obtained from this study could help in tailoring the educational system to provide encouragement and emotional support to African American students. Policymakers should work with educators to craft innovative programs that expose at-risk African American students to strong African American role models, such as principals and teachers, in the school context. Specifically, the findings of the study suggested that the students appreciated being able to relate to their
principals outside of an explicitly academic context; the decrease in formality allowed students to become confident and inquisitive. A mentoring program that allowed African American students to have a greater deal of interaction with their superiors outside of class would likely yield similarly positive results as those indicated in this study.

Based on the results of this study, new guidelines could be provided to the educational institutes; such guidelines could promote giving students the option to engage in mentoring programs. In the future, similar studies could be conducted in different parts of the state to see if the results have generalizability outside of the Detroit context. However, a large sample is hard to achieve when evaluating a localized and specific context through a portraiture analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) because the intent of the research design is to focus on an in-depth exploration of a select few number of individuals. This analysis had generated localized results that could be used to improve the educational system to take care the needs of the local African American student population. The administration of the school district and state-level education policymakers should work together to ensure that other at-risk African American students have the opportunity to become engaged in mentoring relationships with African American principals. Schools in Detroit should also be know that many students may not be aware of such mentoring opportunities, and that efforts should be taken to educate students and parents in the local area of available mentoring opportunities.

The results obtained from this study could help in the designing of new training tools that could be used for the training of African American mentors and would make them aware about the needs of African American students. It is recommended that principals engage in training programs that emphasize the social pressures experienced by at-risk African American students in the twenty-first century. Data from similar studies in the same subject, but at other
demographic locations, could be analyzed together in future. The meta-analysis of different studies could provide us with the conditions and the challenges faced by the African American students and the mentors. This could contribute to the development of an educational management tool that could be used by various organizations. Similar studies could be done at other places, such as industry, hospitals, and other government institutes, where the role of employee and employer interactions could be studied. Future researchers should explore the importance of including a social relationship component in the training of mentors and supervisors. A case study comparing an organization that has a strong emphasis on mentoring and mentor training with an organization that lacks mentoring or a mentoring education component may reveal unique information about the topic, which can then guide more precise research efforts into the benefits and costs of mentoring programs.

The results could also be used by the leaders in the field of education to provide best support to the African American students. By understanding the needs and requirements of African American students, measures could be taken to improve their literacy rate. The findings of the study suggested that at-risk African American students desire the opportunity to excel academically and socially but can lack the preparation, support, and skill sets to do so. With the support of the principals, each of the students interviewed developed confidence and, perhaps more importantly, self-awareness. Several students and the principals articulated that the gains in self-awareness were crucial to the students’ enhancements in grades and social skills. Once they acquire the thirst to acquire more knowledge, then they may explore the opportunities available to them. Therefore, this research could help in formulating new policies that could benefit a workplace and a community by emphasizing the mentoring of at-risk students to improve their chances of academic and social success. Education is critical to the
functioning of any workplace or community, and mentoring is likely to improve the chances of academic excellence for students who may otherwise never have the opportunity to excel.

Limitations

The results of the present study might be limited for a variety of reasons. Because this study was done in a specific demographic area, there were very few students and mentors available for data collection. The group started with more than 15 students, throughout the progression of the program many students drop out of the program, behavior issues, family issues or not the willingness to cooperate. Moreover, the students represented a specific subset of at-risk African American students because each of them came from single parent households headed by their mothers. The collected data might not be fully trustworthy because the student and mentor participants might not have disclosed every aspect of their lives for various reasons. The answers provided were assumed to be an accurate reflection the feelings and perceptions of the participants. The reason why some students chose not to participate was not evaluated in this study, and the purposeful sampling technique used to select the six participants may have inadvertently targeted students who had generally favorable experiences with the mentoring program, which may limit the generalizability of the results. In addition, the data obtained for the present study came from a Mentoring Brother 2 Brother program in Detroit. The findings of the study may not be applicable to other diverse geographical locations. An additional limitation of the study is that the topic of race was not fully explored; it is possible that the openness of the participants was limited because of the sensitivity of the topic.

If the study were to be replicated, it may be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal investigation charting the progress of at-risk African American students who receive mentoring from their African American principals. A longer timeline (for example, from ninth grade
through twelfth grade, or through college) would produce more reliable results and would shed additional light on the influence of such mentoring programs. Similarly, this study could be performed with students who are about to begin a mentoring program but whom have not received mentoring before. Interviews could be conducted with students before, during, and after the mentoring program to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how students change as a result of mentoring.

Conclusion

The interviews with all four students raise the question of whether earlier research and literature have been limited in their conclusions, relying too heavily or exclusively on instruments that do not provide a complete or accurate depiction of the people, cultures, and educational context of mentoring programs. If the students, James, Bryan, Robby, and Jorgé, had been depicted without utilizing portraiture as a methodology, the findings about the positive effects of high school mentoring might have turned out quite differently. Yet, in the portraits of the four African American high school students here it is unmistakably clear that having a trusted relationship with a mentor can alone significantly enhance self-esteem, self-confidence and consequently his or her academic and social standing. In particular, the study demonstrates unequivocally that the chances of the two at-risk African American students successfully graduating from high school are significantly improved by having an older adult to talk to and champion his or her cause.

In all of the interviews with the African American students, a sense of trust looms large in the relationship between mentor and mentee. All four students – both those at-risk and those not at-risk – saw their mentors as reliable individuals. The two groups of mentees appeared equally likely to trust their mentors, and regard them as people who could be relied on. With
Robby and Jorgé, the two at-risk African American students, trust in their mentors’ friendship may be interpreted to have a more pronounced effect, due to the newness of a sustained friendship with a caring teacher in contrast to their dysfunctional home life. But all four students were positively affected by their mentors and this shared characteristic also appears inextricably linked with the students’ own enhanced view of themselves. That is, the ability to forge a trust-evoking relationship with his mentor brought about positive change in each student, not just in terms of their own self-confidence, but also in his ability to tackle and to cope with educational and social challenges.

This study has taken a step in filling a knowledge vacuum that exists on the topic of mentoring African American at-risk students by African American faculty members, especially those in leadership positions, such as principals. The study employed portraiture as a methodology in examining the mentoring relationship between the two groups, one constituted by two African American principals, and the other by four African American high school students, two of whom are at risk. Furthermore, the results of the study confirm the supreme importance of mentoring in shaping the lives of young African American students.
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APPENDIX A: ROUND 1 – QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL MENTORS

1. What undergraduate school did you go to?
2. What graduate school did you go to?
3. What made you go to this/these school(s)?
4. What inspired you to go to college?
5. What was your major in college?
6. What are your hobbies?
7. Where you in any fraternities while in school?
8. What is your hometown and how often do you go back and visit?
9. If you had to be a teacher of a particular subject, what would you teach?
10. Name a turning point in your life that makes you are today.
11. What is your most favorite pair of shoes ever? Explain.
12. What's your favorite sport?
13. What's your middle name? Why?
14. Which member of your family has had the greatest influence on your current way of thinking?
15. What do you keep in your wallet aside from money, cards and pictures?
16. What is something you have that is of sentimental value?
17. What is your most embarrassing moment?
1. What's your favorite sport?
2. What is your most embarrassing moment?
3. What is your very favorite part of your day?
4. How do you feel?
5. What is the best or most interesting class you have taken?
6. Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life? Why?
7. If there was a whole different concept of reality (like The Matrix) what would it be?
8. When was the last time you felt good about yourself/something?
9. What is your worst personality characteristic?
10. How many brothers and sisters do you have? What's your birth order?
11. If you were a shoe, what kind would you be and why??
12. What's the funniest thing you did as a kid that your parents still talk about to this day?
13. If you could be one Disney character who would you be and why?
14. How often do you bid on Ebay? What was the last item you won?
15. If you can thank God for one thing in your life, what would it be?
16. If we Googled your name what would we see?
17. If they made a movie of your life who would play you?
APPENDIX C: ROUND 2 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does mentoring by African American male mentors influence the African American male students?

2. In what ways does mentoring by African American males mentor influence the self-esteem of high school African American male students?

3. Who has been your mentor?

4. How did they become your mentor?

5. How you feel about yourself?

6. How has being mentoring made you feel?

7. Do you think mentoring is effective? And why?

8. What wisdom did you gain from each of these mentors?

9. Reflecting on these experiences, what can you learn about being a mentee?

10. What can you learn that will help you develop others as a mentor.

11. What role does values have in the development of African American students being mentored?

12. How do African American mentors learn to measure their impact on African American mentees?

13. How does A.A mentors/mentee’s teach each other to handle interpersonal conflict?

14. How does having an African American Principal mentor impact you?

15. What changes have you experienced within yourself having an A.A male mentor?

16. What do A.A mentors/mentees need to sustain strong relationships with each other?

17. How do A.A mentors build trust with those whom they mentor?

18. How do A.A mentors learn to develop other students as well rounded individuals?
19. Does being mentoring by an African American male principal encourage you?

20. Does mentoring an African American male student encourage you?

21. Is there currently an A.A male mentor in your life?

22. How many A.A students have you mentored?

23. What do you expect from mentoring, in terms of them giving back to the community?

24. How has being mentored by an African American Principal changed your self-esteem?

25. How have you seen the student self esteem change after being mentored?
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Good morning/afternoon!

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I will honor your time by making sure that I wrap up in the next 90 minutes.

Does anyone mind if I tape record this for our records? I won’t share the tapes with anyone else.

I am a researcher from Bowling Green State University to conduct an evaluation of how mentoring impacts Principals and students in classrooms.

My evaluation is formative and qualitative. This means that my primary point is to gather information that helps describe mentoring and improve its ongoing efforts; and that the information I am collecting is by design descriptive rather than numeric. I have a system for quantifying qualitative information, but for now, I don’t need to be concerned with counting things…I just want your words and your impressions.

All information I collect is confidential as to who provided it. For example, I will not disclose who actually participated in this focus group nor will our final report make any attributions for quotes. I hope this encourages you (if you need encouragement) to speak freely.

My evaluation will result in a written report by (give date).

Any questions before I start?

What similarities do you see the group having?

How has the mentoring process affected you individually?

What have you gained from the mentoring process?

Do you feel that being mentored by the Principal has helped your self esteem/social behavior? If so, How?

What questions do you have about each other mentoring program?

How can you improve or what suggestions would you make to help with growth of each other respective program?
February 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is: Exploring Mentoring of African American High School Males and African American male Principals. I am inviting your son to participate in this study.

The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. I am also conducting this study to contribute knowledge to the field of mentoring. This study will contribute to the field by exploring the influence of African American male high school principal mentors on the behavior and self-esteem of African American male at-risk high school students. This will assist me in gaining a better understanding of your son’s experiences with mentors and how they have helped him to avoid at-risk behaviors.

If you agree to allow your son to participate, I will interview you three times over a two-week period. The first interview will last between 45-60 minutes, and the second interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. We will schedule times and places that are most convenient for you. In addition, I would like you to participate in a focus group with all of the study’s participants (two school principals/mentors and four students/mentees). That meeting will be held after all of the individual interviews and will last about an hour. We will schedule times and places that are most convenient for him. The information obtained from this study will only be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and for educational purposes. Listed below are the terms of the study for your perusal.

1. Real names will not be utilized during the data collection or in the dissertation, and I will make every attempt to protect your son’s identity.
2. Interviews will be audio-taped to ease the data collection. All tapes will be destroyed once the dissertation is complete. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.
3. Your son will be allowed to read his own transcribed interviews and final written chapters for completeness and accuracy. He will then have the opportunity to make additions or corrections.
4. Please understand that your son participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that he may refrain from participation at any time.
5. I may quote him directly or write about his behavior; however, I will not use your son real name.
6. If desired I will send you a copy of the completed dissertation.
7. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement. A copy of all signed agreements will be kept in my home office.

You may contact my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, graduate program coordinator for Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, if you have any questions about the study (phone: 419-372-7377 or paukenp@bgsu.edu), or the chairperson of the Human Subject Review Board at Bowling Green State University if you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a participant (201 South Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 (phone: 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu)).

If you have questions about other aspect of the data collection/dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my contact information is provided below.

I agree to allow my son to participate in this study

___________________________________________ ___________________
Parent Signature         Date

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher,

Lamandren Derrick
720 Second Street Apt 2A
Bowling Green, Ohio 43402
313-673-6372 (C) 313-676-0026 (H)
dlamand@bgsu.edu
Dear Mentee:

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is: Exploring Mentoring of African American High School Males and African American male Principals. I am inviting you to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of your experiences with African American male mentors and how they have helped you to avoid at-risk behaviors. For purposes of this study, a mentor is a person with whom you have a relationship outside of your immediate family. Examples include teachers, coaches, ministers, community members, and extended family members. If you agree to participate, I will interview you three times over a two-week period. The first interview will last between 45-60 minutes, and the second interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. We will schedule times and places that are most convenient for you. In addition, I would like you to participate in a focus group with all of the study’s participants (two school principals/mentors and four students/mentees). That meeting will be held after all of the individual interviews and will last about an hour. You may withdraw from this study at any time. I will communicate with your parents or guardians, via letter, to explain the study prior to beginning it. The information obtained from this study will only be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and for educational purposes. Listed below are the terms of the study for your perusal.

1. Real names will not be utilized during the data collection or in the dissertation, and I will make every attempt to protect your identity.
2. Interviews will be audio-taped to ease the data collection. All tapes will be destroyed once the dissertation is complete. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.
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You may contact my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, graduate program coordinator for Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University, if you have any questions about the study (phone: 419-372-7377 or paukenp@bgsu.edu), or the chairperson of the Human Subject Review Board at Bowling Green State University if you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a participant (201 South Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 (phone: 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu)).

If you have questions about other aspect of the data collection/dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study

Mentee Signature __________________________ Date ____________

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher,

Lamandren Derrick
720 Second Street Apt 2A
Bowling Green, Ohio 43402
313-673-6372 (C) 313-676-0026 (H)
dlamand@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT – LETTER TO MENTOR

February 2009

Dear Mentor:

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is: Exploring Mentoring Relationships of African American High School Males and African American Male Principals. You have been selected because you are African American male principal mentor, and I am inviting you to participate in this study.

A benefit of this study is for educational purposes and to complete my doctoral dissertation. It also should assist in gaining a better understanding of mentors and how they have helped students to avoid at-risk behaviors. I will interview you three times over a two-week period. The first interview will last between 45-60 minutes, and the second interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. We will schedule times and places that are most convenient for you. In addition, I would like you to participate in a focus group with all of the study’s participants (two school principals/mentors and four students/mentees). That meeting will be held after all of the individual interviews and will last about an hour. We will schedule a time and place that is most convenient for you. You may withdraw from this study at any time. The information obtained from this study will only be utilized in the doctoral dissertation and for educational purposes. Listed below are the terms of the study.

1. Real names will not be utilized during the data collection or in the dissertation, and I will make every attempt to protect your identity.
2. Interviews will be audio-taped to ease the data collection. All tapes will be destroyed once the dissertation is complete. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office.
3. You will be asked to read your own transcribed interviews and final written chapters for completeness and accuracy. You will then have the opportunity to make additions or corrections.
4. Please understand that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that you may refrain from participation at any time.
5. I may quote you directly or write about your behavior; however, I will not use your real name.
6. If desired I will send you a copy of the completed dissertation.
7. You will receive a copy of this signed consent agreement. A copy of all signed agreements will be kept in my home office.

You may contact my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, graduate program coordinator for Leadership
Studies at Bowling Green State University, if you have any questions about the study (phone: 419-372-7377 or paukenp@bgsu.edu), or the chairperson of the Human Subject Review Board at Bowling Green State University if you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a participant (201 South Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 (phone: 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu)).

If you have questions about other aspect of the data collection/dissertation process, please feel free to contact me, my contact information is provided below.

I agree to participate in this study

______________________________  __________________
Mentor  Date

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher,

Lamandren Derrick
720 Second Street Apartment 2A
Bowling Green, Ohio 43402
(313) 673-6372 Mobile
(313) 676 0026 Home